





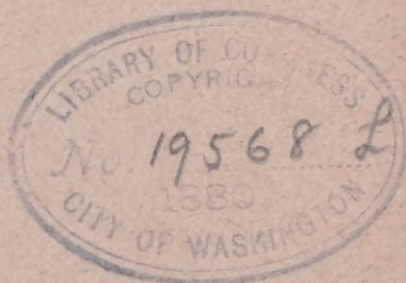
LENOX DARE

BY

handed
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"ONLY GIRLS"

35



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LENOX DARE.

CHAPTER I.

CHERRY HOLLOWS' GLEN.

ROBERT BERESFORD laid down his brush; he had put the finishing touches to his picture. If you have ever written a poem, painted a landscape, carved a statue—if your imagination has ever embodied itself in any form of grace and loveliness, you will be able to enter into the young man's feelings at this moment. For he, too, had fairly earned the artist's satisfaction in his finished work; he had put the best that was in him on that small square of canvas; he had given to it hours out of several days—thoughtful, patient, pains-taking hours, without which no real work is ever accomplished.

It had been a work of love with him, too, where the heart had inspired the brain. Robert Beresford might paint better pictures in the future,—he hoped to, certainly,—but he knew that bit of drawing and color would always hold

something intimate and precious to him which the others must lack, though they brought him the fame and honors he coveted with a young man's ardor.

He turned away to rest his eyes a moment, before he took a last critical survey of his work. Then everything else was swallowed up in a fresh, vivid sense of the loveliness about him.

Robert Beresford drew a deep breath, and rose from his camp-stool, pushing that hastily aside. "What a dim, poetic place that old wood was!" he thought to himself. He drank in the deep stillness, the play of light and shadows on the huge, mossy old boles, the world of greenery above, the beautiful wildness about him. Of a sudden some old lines of Chaucer's sang up sweet as a lark in his memory: he had not thought of them for years. It seemed to him now that the ancient English had grown finer for all these years that it had lain forgotten in his memory, like old wine in dark, cobwebbed cellars. He almost felt himself on enchanted ground. The green depths of the old wood seemed to stretch before him in endless vistas of mystery and beauty. The sound of winds among the leaves was like voices in dreams.

The place where the young painter stood was in the heart of a deep wooded glen or ravine, which lay half a mile wide between the hills. These fell, on one side, to the bottom, in a series of natural terraces, which made the descent as picturesque as it was easy; on the other side the

precipice rose steep and bold, for a hundred feet, to the summit, where a road wound past, just on the edge of the green gulf. Up the sides of this precipice waved dark pines, and mighty oaks, and far-branching cedars; but there were large spaces where the rocks stood out in bare, frowning ledges.

Robert Beresford had been making a study of a bit of this glen. It lay there on the small easel at his feet, while he stood drinking in, with the strong, joyous soul of young manhood, the beauty around him. It was a picture of an old moss-covered trunk, lying across a little mountain brook. A narrow footpath wound away from the bright sunlight into the soft purple shadows of the woods. The blue, shallow water of the brook, the wet stones in the foreground, were finely rendered. The sky, too, had the tender depth of a summer afternoon sky. The little sketch showed throughout delicate feeling and study—a careful treatment of form and color. Yet this would not prove to a critic that the stuff of a great artist was in the painter. The work, perhaps, was only that of a clever amateur.

The singing of a little mountain-stream over the stones, not far away, reminded young Beresford that he was thirsty. He drew a small drinking-cup from his pocket, and started, with long strides, for the brook, leaving easel and picture, palette and camp-stool, behind him.

If you had happened to see him, as he moved away into the shadows, something about him would have struck you, as it did everybody who saw him

for the first time. This could not have been simply because he was a tall, lithe-limbed young fellow, of barely twenty-five, nor because of his finely-shaped head, nor because of his face, which would have been handsome, with those well-moulded features, even had it lacked its rare and noble expression; nor could it have been because his clustering hair and thick beard, of tawny-brown, gave to Robert Beresford a certain striking, picturesque appearance.

All these, no doubt, had their share in contributing to the impression which he was certain to make upon strangers; but they could not fully explain it. There was in the young fellow's bearing an air of pride, and strength, and courage — a something which made one think of Apollo and the morning. Robert Beresford seemed at this time a splendid type of noble young manhood. It did one good to look at him.

As for his dress, that was the simplest imaginable — a travelling suit of dark gray, surmounted by a broad-rimmed straw hat — not a gleam of an ornament about him.

Somebody had been watching young Beresford before he had risen from his camp-stool. A little girl, coming along the road at the top of the hill with a basket of low-vine blackberries she had been gathering in the woods that morning, had leaned over the low fence and looked down into the heart of the glen. She saw the painter sitting there with his easel before him, and his palette in one hand. The sight was evidently a novel one to her. She watched the artist and his work with the still in-

tentness of a wild animal, her eyes riveted, her lips a little apart, her breath hardly coming through them. She was a sunburnt, rather scrawny, rather rumped-looking girl, whom one at a glance would have taken for twelve years old, though she was in reality past fifteen. She wore a hat of coarse brown straw, with a faded purple ribbon across the crown; her dress, of light, striped gingham, had not been improved by scrambling among the bushes and vines; the thorns had torn and the berries had stained it, as they had also the thin brown fingers. The only remarkable thing about the girl was her eyes. They were large and brown, and full of wonderful, shifting lights, as though a restless, eager, but undeveloped soul looked out of them. They had their own times, too, of still, steady radiance, when, if you had seen them, you would have thought of stars shining bright over wide, burning deserts, or over frozen northern seas.

The girl, leaning over the fence which bordered the glen, her basket of berries carelessly poised in one hand, watched Robert Beresford as he rose up, took the drinking-cup from his pocket, and started for the spring. She guessed his errand in a moment. Then a devouring curiosity took possession of her to see the picture which he had left on the easel. If she could only get down there and have one good look at it before he came back! She glanced along the precipice. The steep height, the perilous footing, would have daunted most gazers; but this girl was lithe of limb, and sure of foot, and swift of eye. At another time she might, perhaps, have hesitated;

but now an uncontrollable curiosity forced her on. Without stopping for a second thought, she tightened her grasp on the handle of her berry-basket, swung her small, lithe form over the low fence, and set out on her perilous descent.

She kept her footing marvellously, sliding and scrambling from point to point, now steadying herself by some decaying stump that stood in her way, slipping among broken shelves of rock, catching hold of branches of trees, or twigs of bushes, or great boulders, and so swinging herself down the precipice with wonderful agility. Indeed she had actually accomplished more than two-thirds of the descent when she came upon a huge, decaying trunk of an old tree. Some storm, long ago, had hurled the mighty thing to the ground, and there it lay, a red, slippery, rotting mass, right in the girl's path. At another time she would have avoided it, but her blind haste made her reckless, and every moment was precious. She set her feet on the shining, spongy mass. With the second step they slipped; there was nothing to cling to; the trunk lay at a very steep incline. The girl went down with a little gasping cry. She rolled over; there was nothing to break her fall but a few slender bushes, at which she clutched desperately; but they did not hold. Perhaps she could have stayed herself had she not, through all the fright and struggle, clung with a blind instinct to her basket of berries. As it was, she rolled down, down to the foot of the glen, and fell with her whole weight upon the slender easel, upsetting and breaking that, while the berries, overturning, streamed after it.

The girl lay still a few moments, half-stunned by a fall of thirty feet. It seemed a miracle that none of her bones were broken; but, though she was a good deal scratched and bruised, she was not seriously hurt. As soon as the first shock and fright were over, she lifted her head and gazed about her in a dazed way. She saw the broken easel, the scattered tubes of paint, the stream of overturned berries, and then, in a little hollow on her right, she saw something else which sent her heart into her throat, and made her forget all about her fall. It was a small square of canvas, hanging to a low bush covered with large, sharp thorns. Some big stones, suddenly dislodged, had crushed the canvas down on a branch bristling all over with these great, thorny spikes. In a moment, with a blind impulse of rescue which made her forget all about her own plight, the girl sprang to her feet, darted into the hollow, and caught at the canvas. It was the work of some seconds to disengage it from the thorns. Then she turned it over, and found—what she had expected—the picture that had stood on the broken easel, its colors not yet dry. But the thorns had pierced the canvas in several places, and one had made a long, jagged rent in the centre! The work on which the artist had spent so much loving toil of heart, and hand, and brain—the beautiful picture was ruined!

The girl gave one low cry of dismay, then stood still, as though she had been turned to stone, grasping the picture with both hands, staring at it with white face, and bated breath, and scared eyes.

In a few moments the rapid strides of the owner could be heard, as he returned, humming some college roundelay. He stopped short and stood still when he saw the girl. In his first bewilderment he half-fancied some wild creature of the woods, some Oread that haunted the mountains, had started up before him; then he caught sight of his shattered easel, on the ground, and dashed forward.

In her dismay the girl had not heard his footsteps, but before he had spoken, before she was otherwise aware of his presence, she felt his great shadow darken over her. One glance at the picture in her hand told the whole story.

Robert Beresford's besetting sin, all his life, had been the fierce temper he had inherited from his ancestors. In the shock and grief which followed that first glance at his ruined picture, the strong man's lips grew white, and a little half-stifled moan broke from them. Then a mighty rage flamed through him toward the girl whose mischief, or malice, as he believed, had caused all this irreparable loss.

In that instant of blind wrath he lifted his hand to fell her to the ground. Probably some feeling of her sex restrained the blow, even in that flash of culminating rage, for the hand only dropped, and rested like a weight of iron on her shoulder.

"How dared you do that?" he demanded, in a low, threatening voice, between his closed teeth.

The girl looked up. The tall, strong man, the stern face, the blaze in his eyes, struck her dumb with terror. She feared he was going to kill her. She

could not move or utter a syllable; she only stood still, staring at him with her own great, riveted eyes.

Her silence, her stare, seemed to Robert Beresford only an aggravated outrage, an obstinate defiance. At any other time he would not, with his usually clear insight, have made this mistake; but the girl, who had worked such irreparable harm, seemed, in his eyes, a little brown, wierd incarnation of evil. He really believed that she had deliberately spoiled his picture, else there could be no excuse for what followed.

“Answer me!” he cried, shaking the girl fiercely in his strong grasp. “If you were a boy I would give you the horse-whipping you richly deserve!”

The slight figure shook from head to foot in that iron clutch, but no words came from the dry throat, only a kind of convulsive sob. The obstinate silence only confirmed young Beresford's impression.

Again that fierce impulse to strike the girl came over him. It was all he could do to master it. “Get out of my sight!” he said, in a voice that had in it a low, threatening sound, like distant thunder, and he pushed her from him. She staggered, and just escaped falling. The picture dropped from her hands. Each turned, with a common impulse, and looked at it. It was a cruel sight. It hurt the young painter to the soul. There, on the ground, lay the spoiled thing, to which he had given so many hopes and dreams; every touch of which had been made with some happy, tender thought. The picture was like a part of himself,

defaced and ruined. I suppose no one but an artist and a lover can enter into the bitterness of his feeling at that moment.

Robert Beresford bent down suddenly, caught up the canvas, tore it fiercely into fragments, and tossed them on the air. The girl watched him all the time, with a frightened, fascinated stare. Then he turned, without saying another word, and strode rapidly off. He left his easel and his paints lying on the grass; he never wanted to see them again. The lovely glen had grown hateful to him.

He had not, however, advanced far among the shadowy wood-paths, when the girl on whom he had just turned his back sprang before him, panting and breathless; her face was very white, and had not wholly lost its scared look, but she lifted one hand with a half-beseeching, half-imperious gesture. "You must hear what I say!" she cried, with a kind of fierce passion. "You *shall* hear it! I didn't *mean* to spoil your picture. I only wanted to look at it. But I stumbled and fell when I came down the mountain!" Her voice was steady and distinct, as she said these words. Neither that, nor her strange, dark eyes once faltered as she gazed up at young Beresford. But the courage that had brought her to this point suddenly failed her. Her resolve that he should know the truth had carried the frightened creature out of herself. But that impulse could not last, and now, with a low cry, half of wonder and half of fear at what she had done, she turned and fled, light and swift as she had come.

Robert Beresford kept on awhile through the nar-

row, winding foot-paths which led out of the glen. The brown shadows wavered, the soft lights flickered in vain for him. Yet, as he strode on, the young man was slowly coming to himself. The girl's words had reached his soul, through all the storm of anger and grief which raged there; he could not doubt that she had told the truth. In a flash the whole thing grew clear to him. It had never entered into his thought to inquire how the brown, wierd creature got into the heart of that lonely glen. She might have sprung out of the ground like the armed men of the old Greek legend, for all he knew. But he saw now that, however fatal her accident had been to his picture, she was innocent of any intentional harm. To think of anything human coming down that mountain precipice! The wonder was, not that she had spoiled his picture but that she had saved her neck. He had been unjust, harsh, cruel to her—a girl!

Robert Beresford winced at that. He went on, with rapid, impetuous strides, along the narrow, climbing foot-paths, over the smooth stones and the slippery pine-needles. A sharp self-reproach, a sharper remorse, took possession of him. In a little while it had quite mastered all his grief at the loss of his picture.

He, Robert Beresford, had failed to be a gentleman! That thought stung, as it could only sting a nature fine and noble at the centre. For this young painter had high ideals and fine insight. Whatsoever was splendid in courage, whatsoever was beautiful in purity, whatsoever was lovely in the tender-

ness and gentleness of power and strength, had early delighted his soul. All high thoughts and lofty aims had stirred his young, ardent nature. A true or noble sentiment thrilled him with joy, like the sound of a trumpet; and he was quite too clear-headed and true-hearted not to see that no shining ideals, no lofty sentiments, were worth anything if they did not pass into true and noble action.

Robert Beresford meant to be a gentleman, in all the finest meanings of that grand old word; but now an awful sense of loss and failure overcame him!

The spoiling of his picture began to seem a very small thing to him beside the terrible consciousness that he had failed himself. That wild-beast of a temper, with which he had had many a life-and-death struggle, which he thought lay throttled and chained, had leaped from its lair once more, and proved that it still was his master. He had dared to lay his hand on a helpless girl; he had actually come near striking her to the earth! At that thought a cold sweat seemed to start all over him. He threw himself down on the grass, with an intolerable sense of humiliation and self-loathing. How the loss of his picture dwindled beside the fact of his own lost self-respect and manliness! And he had dared to dream of offering himself to the gentlest and loveliest of women—he who had just insulted all womanhood in the shape of that girl! It made no difference that she rose before him now, weird, unkempt, homely. She was a girl, and he was a man, and by virtue of his manhood he owed her

gentle treatment and kindly courtesy. How could he ever look in the face the woman he loved best in the world knowing that he had behaved to one of her sex like a brute!

Thoughts like these crowded on Robert Beresford's soul as he sat there, while the summer-winds rustled softly among the leaves of the old birch-tree over his head. "If he could only free himself from the consciousness of an act whose memory humiliated him! Was there nothing he could do?" young Beresford asked himself. The next moment he sprang to his feet. His eyes, of dark, luminous gray, were full of a new light, a sudden purpose drew the fine curve of his lips into a straight line.

"Thank God, there was this grace for a man!" Robert Beresford thought. "When he had done a wrong thing he could honestly acknowledge it;" so his nobler self would disallow his lower. The next moment, in a passion of haste and eagerness, he was retracing the mountain-path to find the girl, who, half an hour ago, had fled from him in mortal terror.

His search was not a long one. She had gone only a short distance from the scene of the accident when, quite worn out with all she had just passed through, she had flung herself down at the foot of a tall old pine-tree, whose heavy shadows shut out all the sunlight. She had not shed a tear, as most girls, under the circumstances, would have done. Her face was pale, and there was a slight twitching about her mouth, and a cold chill went over her at times. All that had happened had evidently shaken the slight brown creature, though she sat

quite still, her head bent over hands that, stained with berries and torn with briars, lay in her lap.

She sprang to her feet, with a low cry, when she heard the young painter's footsteps beside her. There was a look of hunted terror in her great eyes when they first glanced up in his face. The sight cut him to the soul. To think that any human thing — a girl especially — should have cause to look at him with such eyes!

The young man, stately as a cedar, with some look of Apollo, some air of the northern Viking in his face and bearing, took off his hat, and spoke gently and humbly to the brown, scrawny girl before him. "I was very rude to you just now; I am very sorry — very much ashamed of myself. I have come back to apologize for my behavior. Perhaps it will seem less offensive to you if I tell you that the picture was very dear to me, and its loss came upon me so suddenly that I hardly knew what I said or did. Can you forgive me?"

While he was speaking the girl stared at him with great, puzzled eyes, whose expression changed slowly from fear to bewilderment. Robert Beresford stood still, waiting for her answer. It came at last — a little, low, fluttering "Yes." It seemed spoken less to him than to something else: some doubt or question in her own soul.

"But I cannot be content to have you say it in that way," continued the young man. "My conduct now seems quite monstrous to me. If you will only put your hand in mine, and say, 'I forgive you from my heart!' I shall feel better."

As he said this young Beresford smiled down on the girl, and put out his hand. His eyes always had the best part in his smile.

The girl placed her thin, berry-stained fingers in his soft, white palm. The strange, puzzled look was in her eyes still, yet this time she repeated his words steadily and clearly, "I forgive you from my heart!"

Something in the quality of her voice struck the young man. He had not once dreamed this rustic child could enter into the soul of his words — not dreamed she could penetrate, in the faintest degree, to the feelings and motives which had prompted his apology. But she was the representative of the womanhood he had outraged. It was to that, and to his own ideals, that he had been speaking. Her voice, however, startled him. It did not seem to belong to her. He looked at her now curiously. But there was nothing in her appearance to strike him, except those dark, dilated eyes, with something — he could not tell what — in their depths. Did the shifting lights and shadows he saw there mean anything but vague confusion and amazement?

Robert Beresford was not certain; so he only said, "Thank you. You have taken an immense weight off me." And he put his hand in his pocket with an impulse of offering the child — he could not have imagined she was more than twelve years old — some money, but again those strange eyes restrained him, and probably drew out his next question: "Will you tell me your name?"

"Lenox Dare."

The name struck him. It had a quaint, pleasant

sound, he thought, and he looked curiously at the girl to find whether, in some subtle way, it suited her.

“Where do you live?” he asked.

“In the house by the toll-gate, at the corner of Hemlock Lane.”

“Ah, yes, I remember—I passed it only yesterday,” and it occurred to him just then that he was going next day to the town, ten miles off, and that he would hunt up some present likely to please the fancy of a girl of this age. He would carry his gift to the toll-gate and give it to Lenox, with some kindly words. He really felt that he owed the child something more than an apology for the harsh way in which he had treated her.

At that moment, however, there came a loud halloo up the brake, and young Beresford started, listened a moment, and answered it with a shout.

“Ha, old fellow, I’ve run you to earth at last!” called a loud, triumphant voice. “I’ve been on your track, through this primeval wilderness, for the last two hours!” and the next moment the figure of a young huntsman, with a gun on his shoulder, emerged from the thicket a little distance off. He was staring eagerly around him.

“I must go to my friend,” said Robert Beresford, and he lifted his hat and bade the girl good morning.

The huntsman would be taken by surprise at his friend’s companion, and the artist was in no mood for curious questions or light jests that morning.

Lenox Dare sat alone where the young man had

left her, at the foot of the mighty pine. For some minutes she hardly moved, except when her thin fingers worked nervously in and out of each other. I have said she had not shed a tear through all the cruel excitement through which she had passed; but now the slow drops gathered in her great eyes, and poured over her cheeks, and dropped on her restless fingers. Then suddenly they burst in a storm. The slight frame shook as leaves shake in summer tempests. How that girl did cry! The noon waxed, the heats grew fervid, but she sat there in the shadows of the old pine, utterly oblivious of how the day was going by her. Sometimes she would spring suddenly to her feet, and pace back and forth in breathless excitement. At these times she would have made you think of some caged animal panting for its native deserts. Then she would throw herself down at the foot of the tree, and break again into that long, wild sobbing.

Lenox Dare wept away something of her childhood in those hours. Years afterward she said to her friend, when, for the first time, she related the story of this day: "That man spoke to the slumbering soul within me. Not knowing it himself, he called to something that awoke for the first time and answered him. Had it not been for him, I should have gone on, for years it may be, groping and helpless as before."

I believe she was mistaken when she said this. I think the time had come for the inborn forces of her nature to assert themselves. They would have groped their way to the light had Robert Beresford

never crossed her path. But the change and wrench would not have been so sudden, so convulsive. For the little girl who went to gather blackberries in the woods that morning was never the same after that day. A new wind of life had blown upon her soul.

Robert Beresford had spoken to her as he would to a lady, as he might to a princess. Nobody had ever spoken to Lenox Dare in that way before. It was singular that the child's native instinct penetrated at once to the heart of his speech. She understood the meaning and spirit of his apology, though she could not have put her consciousness into words.

The long summer afternoon waned and grew into twilight. The sun went down behind the hills in a pomp of blazing clouds. At last the new moon hung its golden sickle in the sky. Then Lenox Dare, worn out with the day's passion, discovered that the night had come, took up her empty berry-basket and started for home. The shadows had grown very black in the glen before she emerged from it into the highway. She was yet more than a mile from the toll-gate. But she stood quite still, looking up, with her great, wistful eyes, at that slender rim of moon, around which some light clouds lay like a heap of silver gauze. Then a change came over the girl's face; a new hope, a mighty purpose flashed in it; a great dazzling light rose and shone steadily in her eyes. She looked down at herself with a sort of pitying contempt. Then her head poised itself with some new grace on the

slender shoulders, and her voice rung out brave, and clear, and sweet as a flute that rings in the heart of summer forests; "*I will* be worthy to be treated like that! *I will* be the lady that man meant when he spoke to me!"

What a resolute little face it was! What a splendor shone out of the eyes! What a purpose riveted the childish lips!

Always afterward when Lenox Dare saw a young moon with gray, trailing clouds about it, that night would come back to her when she stood on the lonely highway at the mouth of the glen, and made the resolve which shaped all her future.

That slight young figure standing in ignorance and helplessness in the darkening turnpike is pathetic enough. The world — so fair and soft to its favorites — turns to her and her kind so cold and frowning a side. To-day, for the first time, a vision of fair and gracious womanhood has dawned on Lenox Dare's imagination. Through lonely years, through struggle and groping and pain will she succeed in making herself that whose loveliness once discerned by heart and soul can never be lost sight of?

By that same young moonlight Robert Beresford was walking among shrubbery-shaded paths which wound through the lawns and past the arbors of the quiet mountain hotel where he had spent the last weeks. The bloom of rare flower-beds filled the summer night with sweetness. In the dim moonlight, in the soft stillness, Robert Beresford was not walking alone. A slender, graceful girl hung on his arm.

Young Beresford was talking. Almost against his will, he found himself telling the woman by his side the story of that morning, of the cruel fate that had befallen the picture he had made of the mossy old trunk, by the blue, shallow brook where they had sat together a week ago. "Did she remember it?" he wondered.

"Of course she did." And as she spoke, a pair of bewitching violet eyes shone on him through the summer night. "What an odd, delightful adventure it all was — what a cruel fate that his painting should be spoiled by that wild young hoiden!"

The look, the words, drew young Beresford on to speak further. He related how, in his first surprise and grief, a devil of rage had risen up and overmastered him; he went over the whole scene in the glen — he told how he had destroyed the picture, and rushed away in wrath and despair; how the girl had followed him, and forced him to hear the truth; and how, when he came to himself, and saw his own injustice and cruelty, he had gone back and made what atonement he could.

No generous-souled woman could have listened to the story unmoved. The bright eyes, when they looked up again, glimmered through tears.

That sight gave the young man courage. He told what a work of love the picture had been; how, above it, inspiring him all these days, had hovered the vision of a beautiful face; how he had intended to place the finished sketch in the hands of the woman for whose sake it had been made. He had dared to think that the fitting moment for telling

her of the new joy which had flashed through soul and heart as they sat together on the mossy trunk, above the shallow, singing brook. But how could he, so lately harsh and cruel to a weak, helpless girl, presume to offer himself to the loveliest of women! Would she not, knowing the truth, refuse and despise him?

It was a strange wooing! The girl on Robert Beresford's arm had had lovers before; but not one who would have dared talk like this. How weak and vapid all their flatteries seemed now! How small the men themselves dwindled in the shadow of this noble youth who walked by her side!

"I—I do not believe she would answer you in that way!" faltered the maiden.

So, in the shrubbery-shaded, flower-scented paths, Robert Beresford and Stacey Meredith were betrothed.

The joy that filled their souls that night had something to spare for others. Stacey could afford to forgive even the "young hoiden" who had spoiled her lover's picture. It was agreed between the two that they would drive into town the next day, and that the lady should herself select the gift they would carry to the toll-gate for the little girl whose life-path had, at this juncture, so strangely crossed their own.

But when they reached the hotel that night, Stacey found a telegram awaiting her. Her father had been taken suddenly and dangerously ill.

The next morning she left for the city. Robert Beresford accompanied her only part of the way.

That time of anxiety and grief was no fitting one to declare their engagement; and young Beresford was obliged to resign his betrothed to her friends, and fulfil his long-deferred promise of joining some cousins at the sea-shore.

So Lenox Dare never got her present.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. ABIJAH CRANE.

MRS. ABIJAH CRANE was a pessimist. Not that she would have had the faintest idea of the meaning of the word, and she would have resented the appellation, presuming it implied some form of paganism. But for all that, her views of the world in general, and of her own fortunes in particular, were of the most sombre kind. She was a small, rather sharp-featured woman, with a face that might have been pretty in its fresh youth, but was sallow and faded now, and had, at most times, a depressed, dissatisfied expression. She drank strong tea, and was inclined to hysterics. She had been for more than ten years the second wife of Abijah Crane; he had been for the last five the keeper of the toll-gate. Mrs. Crane felt very much humiliated by her position, and regarded her second marriage as the mistake of her life, as well as the source of all her ill-fortunes. She was fond of alluding to her first marriage, with a deeply-drawn sigh and a melancholy shake of the head, as the golden period of her life. That blissful epoch, however, had been limited to a single year, and those who ought to know insisted that Colonel Marvell would never have entered into

his last marriage had not paralysis and old age reduced him to his second childhood.

The ancient bridegroom, near his fourscore years, with the title he had won in his youth by gallant conduct during the war of 1812, observed to the last his air of chivalric courtesy toward his wife. His manners were, in many respects, in striking contrast with those of her second spouse.

Abijah Crane was not precisely a boor; he did not lack at bottom a kind heart, but he was dull, and slow, and thriftless. Whatever he attempted in business was sure to result in failure. In a bargain, shrewder brains always got the better of him. He had inherited, at his father's death, a flourishing farm; but the young owner was easily drawn into rash speculations, and mortgages soon devoured his land.

The history of that farm was an epitome of the man's whole business career; and it ended at last with Abijah Crane's sitting in his old age on the little sunny porch by the toll-gate, with a clay pipe in his mouth, ready to hold an endless discussion on politics or the crops with the driver of any team who passed that way.

With a man of this sort, the dark side of the drama usually lies in the fate of the woman whose fortunes are bound up with his own. Mrs. Crane could never forget that she had been Mrs. Colonel Marvell, and the contrast between her former state and her present one, as the wife of the toll-gate keeper, was very gall-ing. It did not improve matters to reflect that her fallen fortunes were largely the result of her own

weak credulity. She had, before her marriage with Abijah Crane, allowed him to invest the whole of the small fortune which Colonel Marvell had left her, in some silver mines a few miles from Cherry Hollows, and which, for a year or two, had turned a good many wiser brains than honest Abijah Crane's.

It was the old story. The mines did not yield as the owners had fondly anticipated, and in a little while did not pay for working them.

Colonel Marvell, at his death, had left but one relative—a little grand-niece, not quite five years old. The old man had been very fond of his small, orphan kinswoman, the last of his race. She had dwelt under his roof for more than two years, and her childish prattle always reminded him of the little girl he had lost in his prime; and it was very touching to see how the old man, as his memory failed, confounded the living child with the other, dead almost two-score years ago.

The little girl had been brought by her father, after his young wife's sudden death, to his uncle at Cherry Hollows. The child had been delicate, and the father hoped the air of the old mountain-town where his uncle dwelt would give the puny frame a fresh start. He left her there when he went on business to Nassau for the winter. He stayed too late in the spring. The yellow fever carried him off after a couple of day's illness.

Edward Dare left what, under the right sort of management, would have been a comfortable fortune for his little orphan daughter, away off among the quiet northern hills in the heart of New York State;

but there was nobody to attend to the dead man's affairs but poor, old, broken-down Colonel Marvell, who liked to trot her on his knee, and watch the little, dark, wistful face as he told her stories about the war of 1812, and filled her dawning childhood with all sorts of weird legends and wild tales of the Revolution.

Meanwhile, the little girl's fortune was left to take care of itself. Colonel Marvell could never be made to understand the facts of the case. He died in the belief that his small niece was a considerable heiress, when the truth was that her whole fortune had dwindled away, or fallen into the hands of rascally agents.

Pretty much the same thing might be said of the old man's property. To everybody's amazement he had married his housekeeper the year after his niece came to reside with him. Before his death he made a will, and, under the impression that his small kinswoman was amply provided for, he left everything to his widow. But the old family estate was heavily laden with mortgages, the result of profitless investments in the owner's declining years; so the honor of his name, and what accrued from the sale of the ancient homestead, was about all that fell to Mrs. Colonel Marvell.

We have seen how this remnant of a fortune came into Abijah Crane's hands. The man was a widower, with several grown-up sons on Western farms. He had been an admirer of Mrs. Marvell's in her youth, and when he called on her in her widowhood, and dilated glowingly on the newly-discovered silver

mines, the man devoutly believed every syllable that he uttered. What was of a great deal more consequence, he made Mrs. Marvell believe it, too ; but it would be doing the simple, kindly nature great injustice to insinuate that any mercenary motives were at the bottom of Abijah Crane's seeking the widow's hand. In her moments of greatest exasperation, she never threw that accusation in his teeth. It had been Mrs. Crane's misfortune that the old boyish admiration she had inspired had survived so many years, and ended at last by bringing her to the turnpike at the corner of Hemlock Lane.

It had brought Lenox Dare, Colonel Marvell's little grand-niece, there, too. The old man had solemnly consigned the child to his wife's care on his death-bed ; and Mrs. Marvell, when she promised to be a mother to her, meant to keep her word. She had been attached to the child, and had, beside, an uneasy consciousness that she owed her some reparation. Had it not been for her uncle's marriage, Lenox would have inherited his property ; and he would certainly have made a will in her favor had he not died in the belief that her father had amply provided for her.

Before her second marriage, Mrs. Marvell had stipulated that Lenox should share her house, and Abijah Crane had promptly assented to this arrangement. It was not in his kindly nature to give the little orphan under his roof a stern word or glance. In his slow, silent way, he was fond of her ; and when, under ill-fortune Mrs. Crane's temper soured, and her tongue grew sharp, her husband did his best,

not always with tact or discretion, to shield Lenox from their effects.

She had been from her babyhood a delicate, quaint child; and her whole life, with its surroundings and isolation, had thrown her on herself, and intensified all her peculiarities. The only playfellow she ever had was her great-uncle. She had learned to read — she could not remember how — and books had formed the solace and companionship of her life. She had access to a large store of these, for, through all reverses, her father's and uncle's library had been carefully preserved by Mrs. Crane, as a visible sign of the better days on which she loved to expatiate.

Lenox had a marvellous memory; and at fifteen she had read more of the best literature of all ages than one girl in a thousand. The finest translations of ancient classics, the old English dramatists and authors, were familiar to her as household words. The library held, too, the works of the most famous writers down to her own time. So she fed her lonely young soul on noble and beautiful thoughts and images. These rows of books in the low-roofed, back chamber of the house by the turnpike, and the world out-doors formed the sole interests of Lenox Dare's life. She was as fond of the woods as any of the wild creatures that haunted them. Indeed, she literally lived out-doors a great part of the time, wandering among the picturesque old roads, the wild glens and wooded hills of Cherry Hollows. No weather ever daunted her, and she only remained in-doors when Mrs. Crane laid her commands on her; then she would betake herself to the old back-chamber and

seize some volume, and become utterly oblivious to everything outside of its pages.

This out-door life, in the bracing air of the hills, was precisely suited to the frail orphan. Every year she grew stronger and plumper, though at fifteen she was still a slight, undersized creature. Her ignorance of the world, of many of those things which possess vital interest to girls of her age, was almost inconceivable. In the life that Lenox Dare led, there was a good deal unnatural and unwholesome, at her years. What would her proud, young father, her refined, beautiful mother have thought of such culture and surroundings for their child? Yet I doubt whether, had any one cared to ask her if she were unhappy, Lenox Dare could, the day before she met young Beresford, have answered in the affirmative. It is true, she had been, at times, vaguely conscious of some restlessness and incompleteness which she could not explain, and for which she found no remedy but the books inside the low-roofed chamber, or the vast "green-book" always spread open for her reading out-doors.

Her deepest trouble thus far had been Mrs. Crane's pets and tempers. The soured, disappointed woman too often wreaked her ill-humors on the helpless girl. Lenox, with her odd, dreaming manner, was a constant perplexity to the toll-keeper's weak, narrow-brained wife. In her paroxysms of ill-temper, she would sharply upbraid the girl with her indolence and stupidity, and set her at some task impossible for her youth and inexperience to accomplish. Happily these moods were of brief duration, and usually ended in a

shower of hysteric tears and complaints over her hard lot, after which Mrs. Crane's skies would clear for days.

Some instinct held Lenox silent during the storm of upbraidings and reproaches. One might almost have fancied at such moments that the girl lacked ordinary sensibilities, as Mrs. Crane sometimes averred. But the young soul was often stabbed by the cruel words. It was also a part of Mrs. Crane's system never to praise Lenox, even when she tried to do her best, and this had a depressing effect on the girl, and made her half believe all that the woman said of her in her worst moods.

Still Mrs. Abijah Crane was not without a conscience and a heart, and these never allowed her long to forget the promise she had made to Lenox's dying uncle. She made herself believe that she bore with Colonel Marvell's grand-niece as she would not have done had she been her own daughter. She could not see that the heedlessness and unpractical ways, which often tried her so sorely, were in part the result of the isolated childhood that had thrown Lenox so completely on her own resources. Mrs. Crane's mind wavered, too, between a doubt whether the child had ordinary capacity, or was greatly superior to girls of her own age. This uncertainty was at the bottom of a good deal of her contradictory behavior; and her estimate of Lenox, as well as of other things, was liable to be immensely swayed by those who happened to be nearest her at the moment.

Lenox Dare, going home in the dim moonlight, with her empty basket, scarcely thought of Mrs. Crane, until she came in sight of the house. It was

a small, steep-roofed, two-story building, of dingy yellow, with a narrow piazza on one side. The house stood very near the road, but there was a little grass-plot in front, with some lilac and syringa shrubs ; and a wild-briar rose-bush made a bright, red-flowering bloom about the front windows. After all, there were worse places to live in than the old toll-gate house, as Abijah Crane sometimes ventured to assure his wife, which assertion invariably brought down a storm of reproaches about his ears. But the sight of her home recalled to Lenox the errand that had taken her into the woods that morning. She glanced at her empty basket with a look of dismay. She had not once thought of it since she overturned it in the glen. She remembered that Mrs. Crane had set her heart on having some neighbors to tea that afternoon, and that the blackberries she had been sent to gather early in the morning were to form an indispensable part of the supper.

Lenox saw at once that Mrs. Crane would be greatly exasperated by her failure to return. The loss of the berries, too, would be a greater offence than her absence. No doubt there would be a scene on her arrival. She never willingly encountered one ; yet her life had taught the child a certain philosophy, which made her take Mrs. Crane's explosions of temper as she would any other disagreeable, but inevitable thing. While she never intentionally offended or disobeyed her, Lenox had long ago gauged too completely the forces of the weak, narrow nature to stand in much fear of the woman. She had a certain attachment for Mrs. Crane, which existed side by side

with the consciousness that she had moods when it was vain to look for either reason or justice from her.

Lenox found the toll-gate keeper's wife seated in some unusual state, in a large rocking-chair, in one corner of the little sitting-room. It had a pleasant, refined air, with its old-fashioned furniture which had belonged to Colonel Marvell. She wore a dyed black silk, and a cap with faded pink ribbons; her best clothes, and the black-feather fan she was solemnly waving to and fro, affected her with an agreeable sense of her own consequence. But when Lenox appeared, the dilatation of Mrs. Crane's small gray eyes was ominous, while she greeted the girl with a stare intended to transfix her.

Lenox stood still, waiting for Mrs. Crane to begin. She felt too worn to open her own lips before she was addressed; still that long, portentous stare could not have been pleasant to any young, sensitive nerves.

At last Mrs. Crane spoke in a sepulchral sort of tone. "What have you to say for yourself, Lenox Dare?"

"I am very sorry that I have disappointed you, Aunt Abigail," answered the quiet, weary voice. "I had gathered the berries, and was coming home with them, but I had a fall — it was in the glen — and I upset every one!"

"What were you doing in the glen?"

The voice kept its sepulchral key, the black fan its portentous waving back and forth.

"Something drew my attention, as I was walking along the road, and after looking over the fence a few

moments, I went down the hill, and, on the way, I had that dreadful fall, and spilled the berries. It was very rash to go there. I thought there would be plenty of time, Aunt Abigail ; at least," correcting herself, "I did not intend to disappoint you."

It was quite impossible for Lenox to relate the events of the day to Mrs. Crane ; yet had she done so, she would at once have aroused that lady's interest and mollified her wrath. Lenox, however, could no more have confided her interview with the artist to this woman than she could have laid bare to her her most sacred thoughts, her palpitating soul. But the habit of silence and self-control which her life had taught the girl could not affect her inborn truthfulness. The meagre, literal facts, which formed her explanation, naturally tended to aggravate her offence in Mrs. Crane's eyes.

Some more of that sepulchral-toned cross-questioning followed, amid solemn waving of the black feathers. It only served to confirm Mrs. Crane's impression of Lenox's culpability. She had lost the berries through her heedlessness, and spent the rest of the day mooning in the woods ! And Mrs. Crane had invited company to tea ! "Could a Christian woman be called to put up with such outrages any longer ?"

Had Lenox been less wearied and absorbed in her own feelings she would have perceived that her vague explanations would only be a fresh outrage to Mrs. Crane. But hemmed in as she was by the impossibility of telling the whole story, and her native truthfulness, the girl felt a great sense of relief when she was at last ordered, with a tragic wave of the black fan, from that incensed presence.

It was not, however, a good sign for Lenox that Mrs. Crane had not broken out in angry reproaches, or collapsed in a fit of hysterics. She sat there a long time in the big chair, rocking herself to and fro, while the fate of the young girl, over her head, sleeping the sound sleep of tired youth, was trembling in the balance. Mrs. Crane was making up her mind what she would do; and she had the blind obstinacy, the cruel hardness with which a weak nature often carries out its purposes. Once her husband looked in upon her with a suggestion that it was about time to retire.

The toll-gate keeper was a short, thick-set man, with round shoulders and shambling gait. His light gray eyes had a kindly expression, but any shrewd reader of human nature, seeing Abijah Crane, would not wonder at the ill-luck which had dogged him all his life. He was a fore-doomed victim of sharpers, the natural-born prey of cool-headed rascals.

Mrs. Crane replied to her spouse's question by a mysterious and tragic wave of the black fan, which effectually silenced him.

The kerosene-lamp had begun to smoke, and he adjusted that, and retired once more, with a rather mystified expression, to the kitchen, his pipe and his newspaper. "There was no accounting for a woman's freaks," Abijah Crane thought, and he had been too often worsted in an encounter of tongues not to have learned that silence was his only impregnable defence.

As that afternoon wore on, and Lenox did not appear, and the prospect of berries grew less, Mrs.

Crane, in her disappointment and vexation, confided her trouble to her guests. She found eager and sympathetic listeners. The subject, once started, grew interesting. The absent girl had probably never held an hour's conversation with the half-dozen guests in Mrs. Crane's parlor, but each seemed to have some special grudge against her, though each would have been puzzled to tell in what it originated. Once on the scent, however, the chase grew exciting, and poor Lenox Dare was the quarry hunted down without mercy. How they did pick her to pieces! It was altogether too suggestive of unclean creatures, gathered with greedy eyes around the dying prey. Lenox's odd ways, her absent looks, her shy manner were all held up to unfriendly criticism, and shamefully exaggerated; while one declared these originated in pride, and another in sullenness, and a third maintained she never had the slightest doubt that the girl lacked ordinary wits!

One, listening to all this, could not have helped wishing that old Colonel Marvell's ghost would start out from among the ancient furniture in some corner, and denounce these slanderers of his little grand-niece!

Yet these women, who had come to an innocent tea-drinking in Mrs. Crane's parlor, would have been aghast had they for a moment realized the prejudice and narrow-mindedness which were at the bottom of all this clack of tongues. Most of them were, at heart, well-meaning souls. They read their Bibles, and said their prayers every night, and went to church on Sundays. Their gossip this afternoon would not

be worth recording here, had it not been for the fruit it afterward bore. That is the great evil with gossip. Its little fire kindleth a great matter.

Mrs. Crane, like all women of her type, was easily influenced and very susceptible to flattery. It was pleasant to perceive herself an object of general sympathy, to find herself regarded as a kind of martyr for her patience and long-suffering with a wrong-headed and more or less evil-natured girl. She began to regard herself in this light, and in order to sustain the agreeable *role*, she went on and on from one story to another, raking up all Lenox's past, and retailing instances of what seemed her ingratitude and general perversity, while at each fresh recital her audience shook their heads and lifted their eyes and hands in horror. By this time Lenox's conduct began to seem something quite heinous in Mrs. Crane's eyes. Had anybody present volunteered a word in the absent girl's defence the tide that set so strongly against her might have turned. But nobody present had brain or heart enough to come to her rescue, and Mrs. Crane wondered more and more at her own apathy and meekness in bearing with Lenox Dare.

"If you were in my case now, and had such a girl left on your hands, what would you do with her?" she asked, in a tone expressive of long and meek endurance, as she turned to the oldest of her guests, a thin, wrinkled, mahogany-skinned woman, with a false front of wiry, yellowish hair, which came down low on her forehead, and a round, flat snuff-box, which she was in the habit of tapping every few moments. This woman's tongue had been the sharp-

est, and her animadversions the loudest against Lenox.

Thus appealed to by Mrs. Crane, the ancient gossip deliberately took a fresh pinch of snuff, to make her reply more impressive, and then, while the others waited curiously, answered in a high, cracked voice: "If that girl was on my hands, *Miss Crane*, she'd be likely to find out afore she was a week older where *I* should put her!"

"But what would *you* do, Mrs. Cartright?" persisted Mrs. Crane. "I have put up with that girl until I begin to feel —" she did not finish this sentence, she shook her head with solemn ambiguity.

Thus appealed to, Mrs. Cartright's little black eyes sparkled with a kind of triumphant malice under the wiry, yellow front; and, as she answered, her cracked voice rose higher with every word, until at the end it was almost a shriek. "I should put that girl, straight as her two feet would carry her, into the woollen mills, over at Factory Forks!"

There was a low-voiced murmur of approval around the speaker.

Mrs. Crane was a good deal staggered. The idea of Colonel Marvell's niece going to work among the operatives — largely German and Irish — in the woollen mills, was something that, even in her wrath, she could not at first entertain. But when tea-time came, and the blackberries did not appear, she had begun to turn the matter over in her mind.

Her interview with Lenox that evening only served to exasperate her further. When, at last, she rose from her chair, and laid down the black fan, her

mouth had a rigid look, and in her eyes there was a hard gleam, which boded no good to the sleeping girl overhead. Mrs. Crane had made up her mind. Little as she suspected it, it all came of the artist and his picture. They had made that day the blackest in the calendar of Lenox Dare!

CHAPTER III.

FACTORY FORKS.

MRS. CRANE did not carry out her new decision at once. She would "take time to breathe," she told herself. Had Lenox Dare suspected the truth, and behaved at this critical juncture with ordinary shrewdness, she might have averted the fate that was hanging over her. Had she stayed a good deal more indoors; had she taken some extra pains with the household tasks — not severe for an ordinary girl of her age, it must be admitted — which Mrs. Crane set her; above all, had she, with a little tact, diverted that lady's thoughts into different channels, by bringing up the old times, and relating her childish memories of Colonel Marvell, the chances are that Mrs. Crane would have been mollified, and that the purpose which she had formed, not without a struggle, and in an hour of extreme exasperation, would have fallen to the ground.

But Lenox, who had no idea of what was impending, was at this time her own worst enemy. Never in her life had she been so heedless and absent. She went through her tasks, self-absorbed and unconscious, like one in a dream. Mrs. Crane, in her present mood, put the worst interpretation on all this; she

fancied Lenox's manner proceeded from indifference or sullen defiance, and she was aggravated in proportion to her mistake.

But Lenox Dare's behavior at this time might have puzzled a shrewder judge of human nature than Mrs. Abijah Crane. She had passed through a great crisis. New ideas, new feelings, a sense of new powers and needs had awakened in her soul. She was like some creature groping in the dark, who catches no ray of the light, no sign of the morning. She herself only half-understood the new clamoring voices in her soul, but they gave her no peace. She had an unuttered, but abiding sense that things could not go on with her as before; that there was something for her to do, but what it was — where it could be found — this lonely, friendless girl of fifteen could not divine. Thick walls of fate seemed to close her in on every side.

“What *can* I do? There *must* be a way,” she kept saying to herself, and it seemed to her the answer must come in God's wide out-doors; and this was why she rushed away from the house, as soon as the dishes were wiped and the sweeping and dusting were over. She went off into cool, shadowy places of the woods, and paced up and down the green stillness for hours; she threw herself on the ground, and buried her face in her palms, while her thoughts groped within her; and sometimes she wrung her hands, and again the words forced themselves in a pathetic cry from her heart to her lips, “Oh, what shall I do?” and there came no answer through the warm, wide silence; and the days went on, and the slender

rim of moon grew large and round in the summer sky ; and Mrs. Crane grew more silent and more aggrieved ; and the fate of Lenox Dare closed more and more darkly around her !

One day, a large antique china bowl, which Mrs. Crane valued, slipped from Lenox's fingers on her way to the closet and crashed into fragments at her feet. She had surmounted a pile of smaller crockery with this bowl. It was dreadfully careless ; Lenox saw that clearly enough, when the sound of the smashing porcelain brought her to herself. She looked up scared and deprecatory to Mrs. Crane. The woman sprang to her feet with an impulse to lay fierce hands on Lenox, but she sat down the next moment, and only said in her tragic tone : " You've done it now, you good-for-nothing girl ! You ain't fit to be trusted with a dish more than a wild colt ! Go and pick up them pieces ! "

Lenox obeyed, glad to escape so easily. It would have been only a fresh aggravation to tell Mrs. Crane that her thoughts had been elsewhere.

That broken bowl, however, was the finishing stroke. That very afternoon, Mrs. Crane went down to Mrs. Cartright's, who lived less than half a mile away on the meadow road, and hired Bill, the old woman's grandson, to carry her over to the woollen-factory, five miles away. While the horse was being harnessed, Mrs. Cartright's tongue was not idle. She applauded Mrs. Crane's resolution, and listened with great sympathy to the story of the broken bowl.

Mrs. Crane had a somewhat lengthy interview with the foreman of the factory. She came home that

evening with an air half-mysterious, half-triumphant. When supper was over, she asked Lenox to go with her into the sitting-room. Mrs. Crane seated herself in the large rocking-chair, and took up the black fan. Then, in a few words, she told Lenox that she had that afternoon secured a place for her as a weaver in the woollen-mills at Factory Forks. She must be ready to go in three days.

The girl listened in a kind of blank amazement. She did not at once take in the full meaning of the words ; but had Mrs. Crane told Lenox Dare that her head was to be taken off — that the block, and the axe, and the masked headsman would be waiting for her at the appointed hour, I do not believe that the girl could have been more shocked as the truth slowly dawned upon her. She was so far stunned at first that she did not show any very great feeling. Mrs. Crane, not in the least understanding Lenox, and curious as to how the girl would take this sudden, tremendous change in her life, watched her narrowly. The woman herself, was laboring under no little suppressed excitement, and the black feathers trembled a good deal as she waved them to and fro.

“I am going to work in the factory ! You have been to see the foreman this afternoon and told him I would come ! Is that what you said, Aunt Abigail ? ” asked Lenox, slowly, and in a sort of dazed tone, like one who tries to realize the meaning of the words he speaks.

“Yes, that is what I said, Lenox,” answered Mrs. Crane, in a high, excited key. “I’ve had this on my mind for a good while ; I’ve felt it was high time you

was learnin' to do something for yourself. You won't be of any use in the world goin' on in this fashion, moonin' among your books, and gallopin' off in the woods all day. It's no way for a reasonable being, and a girl of fifteen, to spend her life. You've got at last to turn to and put shoulder to the wheel, and help earn your own living."

"But you never said anything to me before about the factory. Why did you not tell me, Aunt Abigail?" asked Lenox, from her corner, still in that slow, dazed voice.

"What was the use of talking about it, Lenox?" retorted Mrs. Crane, keeping up her high, glib tone. "I made up my mind to do the thing, and waste no words over it. It was high time, too. To think of a girl of your age lazin' 'round out-doors as you've done of late! Did you s'pose you could al'ays go on in that fashion? If you had been my own daughter, I should have put you at work long ago."

This was Mrs. Crane's clinching argument. Her conscience and her purpose braced themselves against it. She honestly meant to keep her promise to Colonel Marvell. He had charged her to deal by his grand-niece as she would by her own child.

A cry like that of some terrified, strangling creature broke out suddenly from the corner where Lenox Dare sat in the gathering darkness. "Oh Aunt Abigail, do not do that! Have pity upon me! Do not send me to the factory to work!"

The bolt had fallen. The quick was reached now. But that cry out of the young, agonized spirit, only hardened Mrs. Crane. Nothing is so cruel as blind

ignorance and weakness. Mrs. Crane had nerved herself for a scene.

"Come," she said, in a hard, angry voice, "I don't want any actions of that sort. They won't move me an inch, Lenox Dare, so you better stop 'em right off! What I've done, I've done for your good, and you'll live to see it some day. Why shouldn't you be put to work like other girls, I'd like to know? Who do you s'pose is goin' to support you all your life in doin' nothin'? If you was the right sort of girl you'd thank me for what I've done this day, and be glad of a chance to take yourself off other folks' hands. I've got you an easy berth. I took pains to see the foreman and have it made smooth for you. The work's mere play — settin' a loom goin', and watchin' the warp, and threadin' a shuttle. It's true you'll have to keep at it steady — eleven hours a day — but I fixed it so you could have Saturday afternoon with your Sundays at home, and that's mighty good luck for a factory girl."

Lenox Dare, with her little white face, with her great dark eyes full of some unutterable agony, listened to this speech. She was fully alive to its meaning now. Mrs. Crane had laid the young, quivering soul on the rack, and pitilessly turned the screws. This much can be said for the woman; she did not know what she was doing.

Lenox was dumb for a few moments; then, with a kind of convulsive cry, the agony within her broke out into prayers, entreaties, pleadings. I suppose the scene between her and Mrs. Abijah Crane did not last for more than fifteen minutes. She clasped

her hands — this shy, silent girl — she knelt at Mrs. Crane's feet; she grasped the woman's dress; she begged her to spare her from the factory — as strong men have been known to kneel and plead in a passion of agony for their lives — men who died calmly and bravely at the last. But appeals that must, it seemed, have moved a stone, were powerless with Mrs. Crane. Blinded by prejudice and anger, she only found in Lenox's behavior fresh confirmation of her worst opinions of the girl. Her horror of the factory proceeded, Mrs. Crane thought, from bad temper and dread of work. Every gesture, every prayer, every wailing cry, only hardened the toll-gate keeper's wife. Do you know how obstinate and cruel these weak, narrow natures can be when they are once aroused? Had Lenox Dare called on the winds and waves they would not have been more pitiless to her than Mrs. Abijah Crane that night. You would have thought she had not the heart of a woman in her. It was not, however, in the nature of this girl to fling herself long against a rock. In her first amazement and terror she had turned instinctively to Mrs. Crane for help and pity. It was not strange; the woman had been very kind to her at times. But she seemed now transformed to a fury. She snatched away the hand Lenox had seized; her eyes glared; she stamped her feet, and fiercely ordered the girl to "leave off her tantrums and get out of her sight!"

Lenox Dare suddenly grew still. The slight figure shivered two or three times. Then she rose without another word and left the room. The

girl had made her last appeal to Mrs. Crane. She would never again, by word or sign, seek to move her.

The woman, shaken by her late excitement, sat and fanned herself violently. Her little gray eyes snapped and sparkled fiercely. She indulged in all manner of harsh and evil judgments. She made herself believe that Lenox Dare would certainly come to some bad end if she failed in resolution at this juncture. She had carried her point. But underneath all her prejudice, obstinacy and passion, Mrs. Abijah Crane had anything but a comfortable feeling that night.

Lenox Dare went up to her own room and sat down by the window where the large, yellow moon stared down upon her. She folded her hands on the window-sill, and sat there with her stricken, childish face. Sometimes she gasped a little for breath, but she did not sob or moan any more as the future rose before her — a black nightmare, in which youth and hope would be swallowed up.

She tried to look at it steadily — this girl of fifteen — while her heart sickened and her brain swam. She knew a little of what factory-life must be, for one day Abijah Crane, when he drove over to the Forks on business, had taken her with him.

As they entered the bare, sandy level, in the midst of which stood the great, red-brick, four-storied building, with its rows of small-paned windows, she heard the deafening clatter of the looms, and wheels, and steam engines. The next moment the bell in the cupola clanged above every other noise. In an instant

the vast machinery was silent. As they drew up before a high flight of steps Lenox caught the sound of hurrying feet. It was twelve o'clock, and the factory operatives were rushing out to their dinners. For three-quarters of an hour the monster that toiled and roared inside would be quiet. Lenox watched with curious, wistful eyes the swift human tide which poured out from the factory door. She saw hard, rough faces of boys, and men, and young women, and girls no older than herself. Some of these last were pretty, but others had a bold, vacant look under their sun-bonnets and cheap straw hats. Most of the faces, too, were soiled and smutted with the dust and dye of the woollen cloths. A few stopped to stare at her ; but, for the most part, they rushed past her, a tired, hungry crowd, eager for their dinner in the great, unpainted factory boarding-house, across the road.

Lenox, standing on one side, gazed at these girls, and tried to fancy what their lives must be. It seemed to this creature of the woods and hills something inconceivably joyless, hopeless, dreary — as far removed from herself as a life that belonged to another planet.

Afterward, Abijah Crane, thinking to interest his young companion, took her through the woollen-mills and showed her the great looms, where the girls sat or stood all day, and threaded the shuttles and watched the warp. She wondered how those girls lived shut up there in the noise and dust and stifling smells from early morning to sunset, while the beautiful day went on through its long hours of

dews, and sunshine, and singing birds ! How she did pity those young weavers ! Did it seem to them that the day would never come to an end ? Did their heads grow tired, and ache with the endless din, and clatter, and toil ?

“ Let us go away,” she said at last to Abijah Crane. And he noticed she looked tired and pale as they went down the stairs ; but his stolid soul had no conception of what was going on in hers.

Before they reached the last flight of stairs the three-quarters of an hour had expired, and the vast machinery started up again. Lenox heard the clatter of the looms, the rush of the wheels, the roar of the engines. How glad she was to get away from it all into the free, glad May day again, with its world of sprouting grass and blossoming trees, and joyous skies over all !

This had happened months ago ; but the whole scene had taken powerful hold of Lenox’s imagination, and it had haunted her at times ever since.

And now, as she sat there by her small-paned window, in the summer moonlight, there seemed to Lenox Dare something prophetic in her shuddering terror at that time. For she, too, was going to be one of those girls she had wondered over and pitied — she, too, was to wear out the long days in that stifling air, among those whirring wheels and clattering looms — she, too, was to mingle in that crowd of loud, rough men and boys, of coarse, slatternly girls who hurried down at twelve o’clock, tired and greedy, to the factory boarding-house !

Think of this shy, sensitive, girl living all this over

and over as she sat there in the moonlit silence! That vivid imagination, which thus far had made the great joy of Lenox's lonely girlhood, now turned into her finest torment, and reproduced every detail with harrowing vividness.

She wished she could die. The grave, cool and quiet, had no terrors for her. It was only that dreadful monster of a Factory, ready to strangle her soul among its grinding wheels, its clanging looms, that she dreaded. It grew and grew in her fancy, a vast, living, devouring thing.

And the great, still moon looked down on the girl's agony; and all the sweet sounds of the summer night—the stirring of leaves, the murmur of insects, the happy little winds that went to sleep among the grasses, could not wile her for a moment out of her misery. She rose at last from mere habit, and laid down on her small bed, and dropped into broken slumbers; but every little while she would start up suddenly, and find the bright, pitiless moon staring in at her window.

When Mrs. Crane met Lenox the next morning neither made any allusion to what had passed the night before. If Mrs. Crane spoke, which was as seldom as possible, it was with a stare and a sepulchral tone, much as though the girl had been guilty of some crime. But all this was lost on Lenox. She had that to bear which made her quite unconscious of anything Mrs. Crane might now do or say. She went through her morning tasks mechanically; and when these were finished she started for her old haunts in the woods. Mrs. Crane did not attempt

to detain her. She had made up her mind that Lenox should have her own way during these last days at home. As there was some preserving to be done, she thought she was treating the girl with wonderful generosity.

As Lenox was leaving the house, she came suddenly on Mr. Crane, who paused and looked at her with a troubled expression in his large, bovine face. She saw then that he knew. He laid his heavy hand on her shoulder, and shook his head solemnly.

"I am sorry things have taken this turn, Lenox," he said, glancing cautiously at the door. "I'm ready to help you if you can see how."

For a moment, in her loneliness and helplessness, her face flushed, her heart sprang to his words. Was there any help or strength in this man? But when, asking herself this question, she darted a swift, doubtful glance into his weak, blank face, her hope fell. Her flashing intuitions showed her there was nothing to hope for from this source. If Abijah Crane matched his will against his wife's he would surely come off worsted in that contest.

"No, thank you, Uncle Abijah," answered Lenox, softly. "You are very kind, but you can't help me."

She went off into the woods among her old favorite haunts, among the green, still places where her heart had dreamed, and her thoughts had sung to her. No fairer day had ever shone out of the midsummer; but all its fresh light and beauty were quenched in a great darkness for Lenox

Dare. The clang of looms, the dreadful clatter of wheels drowned the singing of birds, the soft voices of winds ; all lovely sights and sounds hurt and harrowed her. She thought of the new hopes and aspirations which had thrilled her soul that day in the glen, which had filled the days ever since ; and she thought how these were to end in the doom that awaited her — in the life that was worse than death !

She wandered up and down the shadowy wood-paths, the hunted look in her brown eyes, and then again she sat motionless as the huge boles around her, with her little pale face full of the despair that lay at her heart.

Oh, my reader, were you ever young — ever young — and did your life ever seem walled up with a great blackness all around you ; and in your loneliness and helplessness have you ever turned wildly on every side, seeking for some way out of your prison-house, and found none in earth or heaven to deliver you ? If you have not, then, unless your sympathies are swift and generous, you will not be able to reproduce to yourself this girl's feelings — you cannot enter into the secret place of her agony.

I am quite aware there is another side to all this. The girls at Factory Forks managed to have a tolerably comfortable time. They soon got used to the noise of the machinery, to the relentless bell, to the monotonous toil. They found this, of course, irksome at times. But I doubt whether the majority would have exchanged the factory-life for that of Lenox Dare, at the toll-gate. They had their holidays, their pride in their new, gay clothes, their evening

pleasures, their walks with their beaux, their gossips and rivalries, their vanities and triumphs.

The weavers of Factory Forks earned an honest living, and led a worthier life than many a fine lady who dawdles away her days in luxurious ease.

In justice, too, to Mrs. Abijah Crane, it must be owned that the woman had no idea of the torture she was inflicting. It was impossible for her to comprehend a nature like Lenox Dare's, and, viewed from her stand-point, there was a great deal in the girl's ways and habits with which it was easy to find fault. It was not difficult to take her absent-mindedness for stupidity, her long, wasteful days out-doors for downright laziness.

The toll-keeper's poverty pressed harder each year, and it seemed high time that Lenox should begin to take care of herself. Had she been her own daughter, Mrs. Crane would have reasoned in precisely this fashion. Whatever fault lay on the woman's side, it was partly also her misfortune that fate had placed this girl in her house.

The day wore away as all days do, whether their hours glide rosy and joyous, as in that beautiful old myth of the Greeks, or whether they grind through long, slow tortures that make them seem like eternity.

The sun was behind the hills, and the dews were beginning to fall, when, at last, Lenox Dare arose, out of mere habit, and went home. Mrs. Crane's manner was not changed toward the girl, unless it was a shade more tragic. The three drank their tea in solemn silence. Lenox did her part at clearing

away the dishes before she went up to her little chamber, the chamber that was all her home in the world — that was to be hers in a little while no longer! She thought of that, as she gazed around the low-ceiled room. The moon by this time was looking in at the window again with the old, mocking brightness. Lenox sat down in her old place, too, but the strain of the day was beginning to tell on soul and body, and she soon fell into a deep slumber. When she awoke, it was past midnight; she was stiff and cold, and she crept into bed, where again she fell into a heavy sleep, and did not awake until it was long past sunrise.

The next day was, in all outward things, like the previous one. Lenox had lived over, in imagination, her entrance into the factory, and her first day there, until it seemed impossible, when the reality came, that it would be any more vivid to her.

The girl's last reading before she met young Beresford in the glen — she had read nothing since that time — had been a biographical sketch of Robert Burns, prefixed to an edition of his poems. The book had belonged to her uncle, but the Scotch dialect had long repelled her. One day, however, browsing among the shelves, she took down the volume and read the brief, harrowing story — the bitter ending of the poet's life. It had profoundly affected her. His appeal, a few days before his death, wrung out of his pride and agony, for the ten pounds which was to save him from being thrust into jail for debt, still haunted her. Those last despairing words, written on the Solway Frith, wan-

dered up and down the girl's brain, and seemed to mingle with her own misery. In all the sad history of genius and poverty there is nothing, perhaps, which has a more awful pathos than the dying prayer of the great poet whom Scotland first killed with neglect and then built costly monuments and held grand banquets to honor!

"Spare me from the horrors of a jail!" went the pitiful words up and down Lenox Dare's brain. "Oh, James, did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me! Alas! I am not used to beg! Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half-distracted! I do not know what I have written. The subject is so horrible, I dare not look at it again."

The thought of that jail waiting for Robert Burns as he wore away the long, cruelly bright summer days on "Solway Frith," and the thought of the great devouring thing at Factory Forks, waiting to swallow up her young life in its huge working maw, mingled confusedly in Lenox Dare's brain. It was giving way under its long misery. She dwelt on all the dying poet must have felt; the sickening terror that must have worked in whirling brain and sinking heart, as the vision of that debtor's cell drew nearer, and seemed to close blackly around him! "If somebody," she thought, "could only have whispered to the man hunted to death—to the great Poet, who was to make the air of all the world, wherever the English tongue is spoken, sweeter and gladder for his singing—that his best Friend was coming; that he would lead him into

the peace and stillness, where there would be no more cruel creditors, no more dreadful jails to haunt him any more! Why could not something tell him that the end was at hand?"

Lenox Dare, through all her misery, felt a flash of joy that Robert Burns could die!

The transition to the thought of her own death was a very natural one. All souls, old or young, hunted and hemmed in, at the last extremity will turn with a sudden blind longing for the rest and calm where nothing can hurt them any more.

Lenox Dare had reached a mood where nothing seemed so terrible to her as life. In going over that time, long afterward, it seemed that this second day had less anguish than the first. Soul and body were slowly giving way under all she had endured. But the thought of death, as she sat there with her feet drawn under her, and the winds at frolic among the far-branching cedars over her head, came and tempted her. It was such a swift, certain deliverance out of her misery! And then there rose up before the girl a spot where Cherry Hollows' creek widened and deepened, less than a quarter of a mile below a little rustic foot-bridge. It was a wild place, full of the weird gloom made by pines and young oaks, and large-leaved creepers. The spot had always a singular fascination for her. A little foot-path led down a steep bank to the creek. Abijah Crane, learning that the girl was in the habit of going there, had warned her to be careful, for the water was at least twelve feet deep at that point. On her return home at night-fall, Lenox would pass the bank which stood

only a few feet from the road. There was a point — she knew it well — where she could see the little foot path which led over the bank and down through the brown shadows to the creek. All day long the thought of that soft gloom haunted the girl; all day long the still waters glimmered before her, and in all the great, cruel world they alone seemed to hold a welcome and peace in their cool depths. She thought of herself lying there very still, with no pitiless Aunt Abigail, no dreadful Factory to torture her any more, and the thought grew wonderfully pleasant to the homeless, friendless girl — to the tired heart, to the distracted brain!

Again the sun went down in its old splendor behind the hills, and the dew began to fall when Lenox Dare arose, out of the old, blind habit, to return to the toll-gate. For the last hour the creek had been drawing her like a spell. She had been wondering whether she should be able to get past the bank when the little footpath that climbed the slope came in sight! It seemed to her that a Power, mightier than herself, would seize her when she reached that fatal point, and carry her down softly to the brink of the waiting waters; and she would not resist — she would go with it!

Lenox Dare walked in the summer twilight along the old winding highway without meeting a soul. All the time she was pondering within herself what she would do when she reached the footpath that led down to the creek. She knew perfectly that everything hinged on that moment; if she once passed the bank she would keep on to the toll-gate. But could

she pass it? Would she if she could? She asked herself this question a great many times, and out of the dark of her brain and the anguish of her heart, there came no answer. She went on and on. Perhaps her gait was a little slower than its usual rapid, elastic one, but it was not from dread of what was coming. At last she reached a turn in the road. With her next step the bank would be in sight. Then, as though a bolt had leaped out of the soft evening sky and smitten her, she stood perfectly still. She remembered that there was a God in Heaven, and that *He* must see and know all about this. It came upon her with a sudden, awful vividness. With a cry that was like a last agony, the girl sprang forward. It seemed to her that fatal something from which she fled was behind her, was pursuing her, was close upon her. Each instant she expected it would clutch her, would overpower her, would drag her unwilling feet backward. With beating heart, and panting breath, she rushed, like some wild creature hunted to the death, along the road. At last, faint, breathless, quivering in every limb, the girl was forced to pause. She drew one great, shuddering sob. A cold sweat was on her. But the bank by the creek lay far behind.

Lenox Dare knew it was the thought of God that had saved her. The cloud of half-madness which had hung over the poor girl's brain through these last days lifted itself, so that a ray of light broke through the darkness.

If she had thought of God in these days it had

been only to wonder how He could let this misery come upon her. She had felt He was too remote to heed or care for her suffering; but now, gasping, quivering with her bare escape from death, a new sense of His power and presence came over her. What if He knew all about His poor, little, hunted, suffering girl — what if He had been watching her loneliness and agony all this time, and was sorry for her!

Was that a whisper in the air — was it a thought that awoke in her own soul? Lenox Dare could not tell. But with a sudden, overmastering impulse, she sank down on the grass in the little footpath, already damp with dews; she lifted her small, pale face, in the twilight. She tried to speak, but no words came, — only one little moaning cry. It seemed to her that it found its way through the infinite spaces to a Heart of love and pity. It seemed to her that Somebody saw, and was sorry for her, as she knelt there — too shaken and worn to utter even a prayer — in the little footpath, in the gathering night.

At last she rose in a calmer, softer mood, and went homeward. No new light shone on the dreadful to-morrow. But Lenox Dare had a feeling that God had saved her from destroying herself. If He would do *that* He must mean to help her.

She was late at supper, and Mrs. Crane's silence was, if possible, a little grimmer than ever. Her husband looked at Lenox across the table with some anxiety and pity struggling together in his light gray eyes. Once he attempted a feeble joke, but a

grim glance and a tart rejoinder from his wife effectually repressed any further exhibitions of merriment.

The remainder of the meal was eaten in unbroken silence; but the youngest of the three had passed through that which would have kept her unconscious though the tongues of Babel had clamored around her.

The next day was to be Lenox's last at home. Mrs. Crane had been revolving this fact in her mind, and had resolved that she would finally put a stop to this "gallivanting off into the woods." Lenox must be made to act like a reasonable being, and spend her last day at home in getting a part of her wardrobe ready for her first venture into the world.

The arrival of some neighbor soon after tea happily made Mrs. Crane conclude to defer the subject until next morning, and Lenox escaped to her room. She sat down in her old place by the low window-sill. It was quite dark now, and the summer sky was all alive with stars. While Lenox looked up at them she heard the insects humming in the stillness. The sky and earth were changed to the girl. The cold, benumbing despair lay no longer at her heart of hearts. It seemed to her that a Power and a Care were over her—that some help was coming, she could not tell how or where. She must wait for it.

But she was very tired. In a few minutes the little, brown, wearied head sank down on the arms she had folded on the window-sill, and the girl fell into the sound sleep of youth and utter exhaustion.

It was almost midnight when she awoke. The moon was up now. It shone down brightly on her

from among the stars. It did not seem the same cold, mocking moon it had of late.

Lenox had been dreaming of Colonel Marvell. She thought he stood by her with his handsome white head and glimmering beard, and smiled on her, and stroked her hair tenderly with his thin hand. She awoke with the tears in her eyes. They shone — those large, luminous eyes — as she looked up at the moon. But her brain was wonderfully steadied and rested, and her thoughts were all alive and at work.

Of a sudden Lenox Dare sprang to her feet. It was like the shock of a blow — the flash of that new idea across her soul. She stood there a few minutes in the moonlight, her fingers clutching at each other, her face all in a tremor of doubt, with a confused, tentative, trembling hope at work in heart and brain.

All the while a change was dawning in the childish face — a change that settled at last into a resolute calm, into a solemn purpose. “I will do it!” said Lenox Dare, in a low, steady voice. “So help me God, I will do it!”

“After awhile she heard down-stairs the century-old clock — one of the Marvell heirlooms — striking twelve.

That sound seemed to bring her to herself. She turned away from the window — from the brooding night and the watching moon.

“Now, Lenox,” she murmured in a moment, and in a low, soothing tone, as one might to a child, “you will have a hard day’s work to-morrow. You need all the rest and strength you can get out of this night. You must go to sleep at once, and not wake up until morning.”

In less than three minutes she had crept into bed. In three more she was sound asleep.

The old clock was striking five when Lenox Dare awoke next morning. The room was full of the new dawn, and she heard the robins singing outside. The face the girl lifted from her pillow was pale enough, but full of a life and death resolve. She made her toilet that morning with some extra carefulness, putting on her best clothes, which were sufficiently plain and old-fashioned. Then she crept softly as a mouse down-stairs.

There was little danger of her awaking anybody. Mr. and Mrs. Abijah Crane were sound sleepers, and if they had heard her moving about it would not have surprised them. She was often up hours before breakfast, and had long walks among the fresh dews and listened to the singing birds before the sun had climbed the hills which sheltered Cherry Hollows.

Lenox set about what she had in hand in a quiet, practical fashion. One would not have suspected the girl was laboring under secret but intense excitement. Once down-stairs, she went straight to the pantry and forced herself to eat a tolerable breakfast. Then she slipped a lunch into a small willow-basket which Abijah Crane had brought her the last time he came from town.

Two minutes later she had softly closed the front door. What a morning she had come into! How its sparkling dews, its fragrant air, its happy winds, its skies of joyous blue, seemed to welcome her! Her heart leaped to it all. The thing she had made up her mind to do did not seem so desperate and half-

mad a thing to her as it had the night before, when the idea first brought her to her feet. She walked rapidly to a little knoll less than a quarter of a mile away. She saw the road she was to go, winding up through the green, dewy pastures. She knew perfectly well that whatever surprise or anger her absence might occasion, she was in no danger of pursuit that day.

Then she turned and gazed a few moments on the little yellow house by the turnpike-gate. It lay there peaceful in the morning light. It had been her home for most of her life. All the happy days she had passed in the low-roofed chamber with her dreams and books, seemed to rise up before the girl. She saw the small panes of the window, where she had watched so often, flashing in the rosy light. A shadow trembled upon her face. But it was her home no longer. She was going out to find, whether, in all God's great world, there was another for her!

"Good-bye," she said, "old home, good-bye!" There was a sob at her throat.

Then Lenox Dare turned her back on the little yellow house by the toll-gate, and left it forever.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM CHERRY HOLLOWS TO BRIARSWILD.

A LITTLE before nine o'clock Benjamin Mavis came outside the front door and looked up doubtfully at the sky. He saw an occasional star glimmer for a moment, and then hide itself behind the clouds that were moving up in gray masses from the horizon. A soft wind was blowing from the south-east.

"The moon has changed, and we're in for a rain," he said to himself. "It doesn't look encouraging for my trip to-morrow; but that can wait until the weather clears."

He had just turned to go in doors, when he suddenly started and stood still, seeing a slight girl's figure close to the front gate. The stranger had stopped there and seemed to be looking eagerly at the house. A hanging-lamp in the hall poured its light through the open door on the piazza, and brought out in strong relief the stalwart figure against the climbing vines.

When the watcher in the road caught sight of the youth, she hurried inside the gate and up the path. When she reached the lower step she paused, and stretched out her hands with a sudden, imploring gesture.

“Who are you?” cried Ben Mavis, moving forward, utterly bewildered at the sight of this odd apparition.

The stranger must have tried to answer. There was a sound that ended in a kind of sob.

Then, as the streaming light shone on her face, the youth exclaimed in a voice sharp with amazement: “Great Heavens! It’s Lenox Dare!”

The next instant he was at her side; his hand was on her shoulder.

“Where did you come from? How did you get here?” he asked, with the amazement still uppermost in his tones.

“I—I walked here since morning,” gasped the girl. “One man gave me a ride in a cart. I have run away. I had nobody else to come to!” She stopped there suddenly. She would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms.

“Walked from Cherry Hollows to-day! Great Heavens!” said young Mavis again. He knew the slight girl had come almost thirty miles on foot!

Then, without saying another word, he took the trembling figure in his strong, young arms, carried it into the house, and set it down on a lounge in a little, softly-lighted, gray-tinted sitting-room, and shouted at the top of his voice, “Mother! Mother!”

An instant afterward there appeared at the door the rather small, plump figure of a woman, a little past middle life. She had a bright face and a fresh complexion, and still retained a good deal of the prettiness of her youth. She wore a simple, dark dress,

with little gray-and-black curls on either side of her face.

“What is the matter, Ben?” she asked, in a surprised tone. Before he could reply she caught sight of the slight figure on the lounge, and of the great, beseeching eyes staring at her out of the young, pale face.

She gave a little gasp of amazement, and then her son spoke: “Mother, this is Lenox Dare. She has walked here from Cherry Hollows since morning!”

“Oh, my poor child!” cried Mrs. Mavis.

“I had nobody else to come to — nobody else!” said Lenox, in just the tone in which she had said it out in the darkness to Ben Mavis, and then her voice failed her.

But when, face and hands full of eager helpfulness, Mrs. Mavis approached her, Lenox Dare suddenly sprang to her feet. She forgot her aching limbs, her dreadful exhaustion. With a swift movement she waved back the hands outstretched to her. “I must tell you the truth first!” she said, and before any one could reply, she began to tell the story of the last three days. Nobody could have done this with such a passion of feeling, such infinite pathos, such limpid truthfulness. She lived it all over again — the long misery, the brooding madness, the awful temptation from which she had barely escaped! She told how, sitting by her window the midnight before, the thought of Ben Mavis, and of the kindly mother of whom he had spoken, first flashed across her, how she had left her home before sunrise, how

one thought and one hope had upheld her through the long, terrible walk of the day.

Nothing human could listen to that girl's story unmoved, and the hearts of the two who heard it — the tender woman, the manly youth, were touched to the core. The tears were streaming over Mrs. Mavis's face; and Ben only kept his back by remembering that he was a man, and almost twenty at that.

"I am all alone in the world. There is nobody to help me!" said Lenox Dare, turning her great, wild eyes from mother to son, as she concluded. "If you will let me stay here a little while until I can think what I can do, I will be very good. It seemed to me if I could once get where you were, and tell you my story, you would not send me away; you would take pity on me and help me. So I have walked all this long way just to say to you: 'Save me from Mrs. Crane — save me from that awful factory!'"

"They'll never get you across its threshold while I have a sound bone in my body!" growled Ben Mavis, and his brown, handsome face flushed crimson between wrath and pity. "I'd like first to tar and feather that old toll-keeper's vixen of a wife, and then ride her on a rail!"

Then the soft, pitying voice of the mother followed the son's low growl: "My poor little girl, we shall never send you back to the factory — never! Nobody shall harm you now. You shall stay with us just as long as you want to, and we will take the best care of you."

Poor Lenox Dare! She tried to speak, but the words died in her throat. The sudden relief fol-

lowed too soon the long strain, the utter exhaustion. She dropped down in a senseless heap on the lounge.

Three months before that night, Lenox Dare saw Benjamin Mavis for the first time. The young man, on his way to Seneca Lake, passed through the toll-gate. Abijah Crane, always glad of a chance for a talk, induced him to stop and answer some inquiries about people whom the toll-keeper had known at Briarswild, the town lying off among the hills to the west, where young Mavis resided.

While the two were talking, Lenox happened to come out of the house, and caught sight of a little, slenderly-built, dark gray colt, by the side of its mare. Lenox had a passion for horses. She went up at once to the little quadruped, and put her arm about its neck, and smoothed its nose, and stroked its soft mane. The shy, three-year-old animal took kindly the soft, caressing touch. It laid back its ears, it tossed up its head, and then bent it down to the girl's hand.

"O pony!" said Lenox Dare, hanging fascinated about the gracefully-built creature, and smoothing its glossy hide, "If I only had *you*, I wouldn't ask for anything else in the world! Don't I wish you were just my own, you graceful-limbed, fiery-eyed, mouse-colored darling! Wouldn't we have glorious times up among the hills and down on the river-road! Oh, gray little colt, if you and I only belonged to each other we would be the happiest pair in all the world!"

A little noise at her ear startled the girl. She looked up and saw a young man, with a frank, hand-

some face under a straw hat, gazing at her with amused eyes. He wore a light suit of clouded gray. He must have been very young. There was a light yellowish down on his chin.

Poor Lenox's cheeks blazed as she thought this stranger must have overheard more or less of her foolish talk to his colt; but he spoke at once in the frankest, kindest way.

"You've taken a wonderful fancy to my little colt, I see."

"I couldn't help it," said Lenox. She is such a beauty! But my talk just now must have sounded very absurd. I hope you did not hear much of it."

The young man smiled. What a pleasant smile he had with his rows of perfect teeth! "I should like to hear a good deal more talk of that sort!" he said, still looking with a kind of pleased surprise at the dark flushed face, at the great, brown eyes, all alive now with excitement. "You must like horses better than one girl in — in a million, I should say!"

"I don't know about other girls. I have had no opportunity of comparing my tastes with theirs," replied Lenox, with a little old-fashioned air, that would not have misbecome a grandmother, and that was the result of her isolated life and lack of all childish companionship and habits. "But the sight of a little colt always thrills me with perfect delight — sets me half wild to get on its back."

"Suppose you try Dainty, then?" said the owner, speaking on a sudden impulse. "Nobody has ever mounted her before, and she won't know what to make of you at first; but she has no bad tricks. You are such a light weight, too."

“Oh, thank you! What fun that will be!” cried Lenox, her eyes dancing. “What a pretty name, and how perfectly it fits the creature!”

So the ice was broken in five minutes between the shy girl and the young stranger, as it might not have been, under ordinary circumstances, for weeks.

Afterward he assisted her to mount the colt. The animal did not take it quietly at first; she plunged and reared, and made desperate efforts to throw her rider, but her owner kept at her side, and Lenox behaved admirably. She had been used to sitting Colonel Marvell's old black mare, and was a born horsewoman. She clung fast to Dainty's neck, and when the creature was rearing her worst brought her to her senses and her feet by leaning over and giving her a smart blow on the nose. At last she quieted, and getting used to her rider condescended to carry Lenox, at least a quarter of a mile up the turnpike, with only a moderate amount of shying and rearing her owner walking all the time by her side, talking to her in the voice she knew, and giving Lenox an occasional caution. Altogether the ride was a success.

When the girl dismounted at the toll-gate, a picturesque object, with her dark hair blowing about her unbonneted head, her face all bright with excitement and fun, she felt better acquainted with the stranger she had met for the first time half an hour ago than she did with almost anybody else in the world. They had learned each other's names, and exchanged some facts regarding their personal histories. The young man had come from Briarswild,

a large, rather sparsely settled township, thirty miles west of Cherry Hollows, and at least a dozen from any railroad.

Benjamin Mavis's mother was a widow, and he was her only son. He was now going down on some business among the vine-growing districts, in the vicinity of Seneca Lake.

In the course of their talk, the young man alluded to the toll-gate keeper as Lenox's father, and this brought out her explanation of their very remote connection. "Mrs. Crane was my grand-uncle, Colonel Marvell's widow. I have not a single relative in the world." She said this after she had dismounted at the gate, and was stroking Dainty's nose.

"Not one in the world — such a young girl as you are!" said the young man, and there was a touch of pity in his voice, in his pleasant, frank eyes as they looked at her.

"It must be very delightful to have a mother," said Lenox, looking up in her odd, abrupt way, without answering his question. "I have often wondered what mine would have been like. I should like to hear something about yours!"

"It is not easy to talk about my mother," replied Ben Mavis, startled and puzzled at Lenox's strange speech. "I can only say she is the dearest, softest-hearted little woman in all the world."

Lenox's eyes sparkled with pleased interest; then a shadow crept into them. "I suppose you love your mother very much," she said, in a grave tone, a moment later.

"Why, yes," answered Ben Mavis, with a little

embarrassed laugh, almost like a girl's. "Does that seem very strange to you?"

"Not that, precisely," answered Lenox, shaking her head in a slow, sorrowful way. "I was only thinking how nice it must be to have somebody one *could* love in the world!"

"Why, haven't *you* anybody?" asked Ben Mavis, and he looked at the girl with a pitying curiosity in his honest young face.

She gazed up at him with her bright, solemn eyes. The hand that was stroking Dainty's nose paused a moment. "No — not anybody!" she said. "But I know what it means," she went on in a moment, before the young man, surprised and shocked, could think of anything to say. "I loved my uncle — old Colonel Marvell — very dearly. I loved him so, though I was a very little girl, only five years old, that I would have died if that would have done any good — if it would have had him live!" Her lips quivered. There was at the same time a shadow and a brightness on her face.

Young Mavis was strangely touched. "But these people with whom you live," he said, glancing at the house. "I see you call them aunt and uncle. They must be something to you?"

"Yes, they are," answered Lenox, with the old, grave air, that set so oddly on her childish face and figure. "I like uncle Abijah, who is always kind, and would do anything for me; and I like aunt Abigail — at times — very much; but that is not love," speaking very decidedly. "I know — I have *felt* the difference."

Young Mavis, though time was precious, found it difficult to tear himself away from the toll-gate that morning. When he returned home, which he was obliged to do by another route, he related to his mother his interview with the girl who lived on the Cherry Hollows turnpike, and who had talked in such a strange fashion to his colt.

Mrs. Mavis listened, amused and interested, but, as her son proceeded, her feelings became deeply enlisted. The lonely orphan girl "with no one in the wide world to love," touched the mother-heart of the woman. She made Ben go over several times with what Lenox had said. At last it flashed across her that she had heard her father, in her girlhood, speak of old Colonel Marvell, whom he had known when they were young men. The fact, when it dawned on Mrs. Mavis, enabled her to supply some gaps in Lenox's history. After that, her heart often yearned over the motherless little girl at the toll-gate.

It happened that young Mavis had business a month later which took him again through Cherry Hollows. This time the colt was not with him; but he made up his mind that he would not pass the toll-gate without seeing Lenox Dare. He came upon her just as she was leaving the house. Her face brightened at seeing him, and the two — the frank-hearted youth and the simple-natured girl — met like old friends.

Lenox asked the young man into the little, low-ceiled parlor, with its dark, old-fashioned furniture, and it was very odd how much the two found to say to each other. Fortunately, Mrs. Crane was out, and

could not interfere with the talk or monopolize the conversation.

"Can you guess what my mother says about you?" inquired Ben, as they sat there with the soft June wind blowing the fragrance of the red, thickly-blossomed rose-bushes in at the windows.

Lenox's great eyes opened wider at that question.

"I'm sure I could never guess!" she said. "What could your mother say? What does she know about me?"

"Oh, she knows more than you suspect," replied Ben, with his pleasant laugh. "I told her all about our meeting; and it appears my grandfather knew, long ago, your uncle, Colonel Marvell."

"He did?" interrupted Lenox, voice and face full of glad surprise.

"Yes. So you see we have a right to be friends on the strength of that old acquaintance. But when I told my mother about you, she said: 'Ben, I know what that girl needs. She just wants *mothering*.'"

To his dying day Ben Mavis will not forget the girl's looks. "Did your mother say *that*?" she cried.

"Yes," he answered. "And what is more, she said she would like herself to do the mothering awhile, if she could get near enough to you."

"I should like to see your mother—oh, I should like to see her!" said Lenox, after a little pause.

"You can, very easily," replied Ben, "if you will only come to Briarswild and make us a visit. It is a pleasant half day's ride over the hills.

"Oh, thank you! I never made a visit in my life;

but I am sure it would be delightful to go where your mother was. I don't think aunt Abigail would object, either, if it was proposed to her at the right time."

Ben Mavis, though he had never seen Mrs. Crane, had formed his own impressions regarding her. After Lenox's speech, he made up his mind, with the swift positiveness of youth, that she was a heartless old dragon!

He sat there a long time and talked with his little, quaint hostess, while the sunshine lighted up the dark furniture, and the roses shone red at the window. It was quite a new experience for both of them. Young Mavis told Lenox about his home, about his mother, about Dainty. He described the gray cottage perched among the hills, on the highest point in the county. From the front door, he told her, there was a wonderful view. You could take in, at a single glance, a scene of full twenty miles.

Lenox drank in his talk with radiant eyes. "Oh, if I could only see it all!" she said.

"We shall be happy to have you do so any day," replied Ben, courteously.

Lenox thanked him, but her look was a little dubious. There was aunt Abigail. It would be counting without their host not to keep her in mind. This time she did not express her doubts, but Ben read them in her face, and at once concluded that the toll-gate keeper's vixenish wife was at the bottom of them. It would go hard with him, he thought, if he did not find some means to bring her to terms. He was a warm-hearted fellow, but his prejudices were very stubborn things.

When the young man arose to go, he drew from his pocket a small parcel in white paper.

"My mother sent that to you," he said, simply, and he went away before she could open it.

Even Abijah Crane, discussing with some neighbors on the side porch the prospects of the next presidential campaign, knew nothing of the young man's visit.

When she undid her parcel Lenox found a shallow white box, and inside this was a little scarf of rose-pink. It was light as mist, as lovely as a bit of cloud flushed with sunrise. When Lenox caught sight of it she gave a little cry. She had a girlish delight in bright colors and lovely things. She wound the scarf about her head, and the rose-pink meshes threw a glow on the small, dark face.

After that Lenox thought a great deal about Ben Mavis and the tender-eyed mother, and the home he had described set gray and gabled on the distant hills. She wondered if she should ever see it, and look up into the kindly face of the woman who had said she needed "mothering!"

Lenox did not repeat that speech to Mrs. Crane when she told her about young Mavis's visit and showed her the scarf. The woman, like her kind, had the most inflexible notions respecting a young girl's observance of all the small proprieties. When she first learned about the ride on the unbroken colt, she had given Lenox a sharp scolding for being such a "tomboy;" but on discovering that the owner's grandfather had been an acquaintance of Colonel Marvell's, her tone was instantly mollified, and she

very much regretted that she had not been at home to receive the young man.

The adventure in the Glen, with the events that followed, had driven every other thought out of Lenox Dare's mind. We have seen how in a moment, in a flash, Ben Mavis, or rather Ben Mavis's mother, came up to her in that last midnight she was ever to spend at Cherry Hollows. That brought her, an instant later, to a life-and-death resolve. It upheld her through all the lonely, terrible walk of the next day — a walk that was only once broken by a kindly old farmer, who gave the girl a "lift" of three or four miles in his cart.

During the day she had spoken to only two or three people, of whom she had inquired the way. She held to the open hill-road which young Mavis had described. The day had been sultry, but Lenox's excitement had kept her at a brisk walk through the morning. As noon drew on, and the heat grew, her strength flagged. She had rested under some trees by the roadside, and fortified herself with the lunch she carried. But the afternoon had brought terrible work, and the ache and dragging in all her limbs made the last miles, the gathering clouds, the closing-down of the night, seem like some horrible dream.

Benjamin Mavis was expecting to leave home the following day, and on his return to pass through Cherry Hollows. His account of his last call at the toll-gate had deepened his mother's interest, and she had written a note to Mrs. Crane asking that Lenox Dare might be allowed to visit her.

Ben was to deliver this to the toll-gate-keeper's wife. The note showed very plainly that Mrs. Mavis was not lacking in womanly tact; but Mrs. Abijah Crane was never to read the words that would have immensely gratified her; and Mrs. Mavis, while she made her nice little programme for the girl's visit, little imagined at what hour and in what plight Lenox Dare would first cross her threshold!

The woman's first care was to restore the little fugitive to consciousness. It was some time before Lenox opened her eyes to see the kind, anxious faces bending over her. But she was too thoroughly spent to feel much emotion, or even to swallow the cordials they brought her. She only realized that she was safely sheltered now from the wide, homeless out-doors in which, it seemed to her, she had been wandering for ages. She wondered vaguely whether she was in the world, or had waked up in Heaven! She was not sure, and she was quite too tired to care.

Mrs. Mavis and her housemaid got the tired limbs into a warm bath, and then clothed them in a soft night-robe; Ben himself took the slight, drooping figure in his strong arms, and carried it up-stairs into a wide, cool chamber opposite his mother's, and laid it on a snowy bed in one corner, with a little tasteful canopy, and soft, white draperies, beneath which a fairy might have laid her rosy limbs in slumber.

For three years nobody had slept in that bed. It had seemed all this time to Mrs. Mavis that the place was set apart to one memory; but now she found, to her surprise, that her heart had no room for any feeling

but yearning gladness because the tired, homeless fugitive lay on the pillows where another young face had so often nestled; only one had been rosy with health, and dimpled with laughter, while the other was white and still — a picture of hopeless sorrow.

Lenox was haunted by frightful dreams. Evil eyes glared upon her. She would spring from her sleep with moans and cries; and in her confusion and terror could not at first be made to realize where she was. After a little while she would come to herself, reassured by kind faces and soothing voices, and would nestle down again to sleep. But this would last only a few minutes, and she would spring up again, and stare in bewildered terror around her. Mrs. Mavis or the girl remained with her during the night.

The next morning Ben Mavis started in a blinding rain for the doctor. Lenox had grown worse. It was impossible to convince the poor child for more than a minute or two that she was among friends, who would not let any harm come near her. She lived over the dreadful yesterday, over the horror of the days which preceded it. It was heart-rending to hear the child's entreaties not to be taken back to Mrs. Crane. Then she would fancy herself in the factory, amid the thunder of the wheels, the clatter of the looms, and with the faces of the night grinning and mocking about her.

The doctor came; an old family friend to whom they could safely confide Lenox's story. He pronounced the girl on the verge of brain fever — nothing, he insisted, would save her from it but watch-

ful care and skilful nursing. She was sure to have these where Mrs. Mavis was. It was almost dark when the opiates he administered took effect, and Lenox sank into a deep slumber.

That evening the mother and son had a long talk together. Lenox's fate rested now in their hands. Could her dead parents — could doting old Colonel Marvell — have spoken from their graves, they could have chosen no kindlier lot for their child. The girl who, in her utmost loneliness and despair, had sought these two — the girl who, in the night, had barely reached them, to fall helpless on their threshold, should find across it, from henceforth, shelter, and care, and love. Their doors should shut her in from the storms forever! They did not say it in these words; they said it in fewer and homelier ones. There had been a thought in the heart of both, especially the mother's, to which she now, for the first time, gave expression. "All day it has seemed like my poor little dead Janet over again! What if it had been her, Ben — what if it had been her!"

She broke down there into sobbing. Ben tried to answer her, and got up instead and walked to the window, where the soft rain was falling, and he did not see it. In a few moments the mother stopped crying. Mrs. Mavis had those blessed, helpful instincts which always, when there was anything to be done, got the better of her own griefs. It was like the little woman, too, with her native honesty, and her practical sense, to insist that the people at the toll-gate should be at once informed about the lost girl. Here Ben demurred. His indignation at Mrs.

Crane blinded his clear instincts. He could not see the wisdom of the course his mother proposed. "It was not their business," he averred, "to go round the country telling people where Lenox Dare could be found. If they wanted to know, they could come and learn for themselves. As for that old she-dragon at the toll-gate, she had not only driven Lenox from her door, but come within an inch of causing the poor girl's death! If she could have a good scare — be made to feel that she was a murderer — so much the better!"

Mrs. Mavis did not reprove this rather savage talk. She was herself greatly outraged with Mrs. Crane; she would gladly have given the woman such a piece of her mind as no mortal had ever heard from those gentle lips; but she saw that the indulgence of her feelings might, in the end, do Lenox harm. Her absence must already have created no little stir at Cherry Hollows. If her fate remained any longer in the dark the whole country-side would be roused; a wide search for the missing girl would be set on foot; rewards would be offered; the whole affair would get into the papers, and Lenox's name and history would all be exposed to an unpleasant publicity. Mrs. Mavis set all this in its strongest light before her son. The fiery youth was compelled at last, much against his will, to admit the force of her arguments. The result of the conference was, that Ben agreed, in case Lenox had a comfortable night, to start next morning for Cherry Hollows.

CHAPTER V.

NEMESIS.

LATE in the forenoon of the following day Ben Mavis drew up his light wagon at the toll-gate.

Perhaps Mrs. Crane had never been quite so angry with Lenox as she was when, on going to her room the morning of her departure, she first discovered her absence. She took it for granted that the girl had, at last, openly defied her authority, and gone off into the woods for the day to avoid any preparations for leaving home. She fancied Lenox hoped by this means to escape going to the factory at the appointed time, and was more than ever convinced of her general artfulness and perversity.

As the day wore on, and Lenox did not appear, Mrs. Crane packed the little hair-cloth trunk with the girl's slender wardrobe, resolved that no human power should prevent her setting out early the next morning for Factory Forks.

The night closed down at last, the big drops of rain began to fall, and Lenox did not appear.

At last Abijah began to grow anxious. He had had a most uncomfortable day of it. In some mysterious way his wife seemed to hold him responsible

for Lenox's absence, and had visited her displeasure on him by snappish rejoinders, by sudden explosions of temper, or by fits of grim silence that seemed to fill the domestic atmosphere like a lowering thunder-cloud.

It was not, therefore, until he had stood at the door, and gazed for some time up the road in the hope that he should see a small, swift figure emerge from the growing darkness, that the toll-keeper mustered courage to turn into the sitting-room, where his wife, seated in her chair of state, was nursing her wrath, and inquired rather deprecatingly: "You don't s'pose anything can have happened to Lenox, do you?"

"What do you s'pose can have happened to her?" was the very tart rejoinder. "That girl knows enough to look out for herself when she's where she ought not to be."

"'Tain't like Lenox to run off and stay like this," answered Abijah, taking no notice of his wife's stricture. "It's goin' to rain hard, too. I hope she'll get in afore the storm comes down." Then, without waiting for a reply, he shuffled back to his seat at the front door, and gazed with unwinking eyes into the gray darkness.

He had sat in this way for more than an hour. The wind was rising, and the big drops had become a heavy shower. At last Mrs. Crane came out to him.

"What can that girl think of herself staying out in such weather?" she exclaimed.

One might have detected a little repressed uneasiness in her voice.

"That's what I've been asking myself for the last hour," replied Abijah. "'Tain't like Lenox to act like this," he repeated, significantly.

"One can never tell what is like that girl," replied Mrs. Crane, but the secret uneasiness was still in her voice, and she came to the front door and listened to the rising wind and the patter of the rain. They had an aerie kind of sound, and the blackness outside added to their effect.

At last Mrs. Crane turned to Abijah, making no attempt this time to conceal her growing nervousness, and inquired, "What did you mean when you asked me just now if I s'posed anything could have happened to Lenox?"

"Well, I meant to say," replied the toll-gate keeper, his anxiety raising him into a grand indifference to the consequences that might follow this speech, "that I ain't been stone-blind o' late!"

His ambiguity, and her increasing nervousness, came nearly throwing Mrs. Crane into hysterics. With an effort she controlled herself.

"Abijah Crane," she said once more, with a slow, desperate emphasis on his name, "will you speak this time so that a sensible woman can understand you?"

The man rose to his feet. He had something on his mind which he could not deliver sitting in his chair.

"Well, then," he said, and his deliberate, solemn tone was sufficiently effective, "I've seen that Lenox Dare wasn't herself these days. I've watched her. I hain't liked the look in her eyes. But a man some-

times learns by experience it ain't safe for him to tell what's on his mind!"

This was a home-thrust. He had made lighter ones, and had to pay the penalty. The fact that Mrs. Crane did not at once apply the general remark was strong proof of her anxiety.

"What have you seen in Lenox Dare's eyes?" she asked, in a rather unsteady voice.

"I've seen that girl was wild, and desperate, and half-mad!" answered Abijah, quite reckless now where his adjectives might strike. "And when folks reach that pass, and are driven to bay, there's no tellin' what they may do to others, or — THEMSELVES!"

Mrs. Crane shuddered. She had had a blow! The force of it was in that last word. She went back into the kitchen, where a light was burning, and sat down all of a tremble.

It was a sleepless night to the man and woman under the roof of the toll-house. The winds cried upon the hills, and rushed loud and fierce through the valley of Cherry Hollows. The two listened through all the stormy night-watches for a sound at the door of feet that never came.

Mrs. Crane's conscience awoke under her anxiety, and she began to see her conduct in a new light. In her secret soul she felt that she had dealt very harshly by the orphan. In some faint degree she entered into her feeling about the factory, and in her new frame of mind could find many things to explain or palliate Lenox's late singular behavior. She had never wilfully disobeyed her, and the woman knew that noth-

ing short of despair could have driven the young, timid girl from her home in that wild night. "What if she had gone suddenly mad, and —"

Mrs. Crane would not finish the sentence, even in her secret thought, but a shudder went over her. She knew the same fear had crossed her husband's mind.

Toward morning Mrs. Crane lay down on the lounge, and, worn out with nervous excitement, fell asleep. Suddenly she sat up, her face pale and scared, a cold sweat starting all over her. She had dreamed that old Colonel Marvell stood before her. She saw the glittering of his gray beard, of his white hair, as Lenox had seen them in her dream the night before. He looked at her with stern, reproachful eyes. "What have you been doing to my little girl?" he asked.

In her agitation, on awaking, Mrs. Crane related this dream to her husband. His sole comment was: "Well, I never did approve of sendin' off Lenox Dare to that factory to work. 'Twasn't the place for her. I should have said so, too, if you'd taken the trouble to ask my opinion."

So the dead husband and the living one seemed to conspire against Mrs. Crane.

At that thought she burst into hysterical sobbing, and two or three cups of strong green-tea hardly sufficed to quiet her.

Soon after dawn the rain ceased, and early in the morning Abijah started off in quest of Lenox. He knew most of her favorite haunts in the woods; but he took the road which led to the creek. He had en-

tered the shadowy gloom, and approached the brink where the water was deepest, when a sick faintness seized his short, heavy frame. He grew very white. He could not bring himself to glance into the dark, swollen currents, lest something lying there should confirm the horrible fear that had brought him straight to this spot. At last, with a shudder, he forced himself to look down. He could see into the depths of the black, hurrying water. Nothing was there. In his sudden relief he gasped for breath, and the strong man was as weak for joy as he had been a moment before for dread.

He returned home at once, and told his wife where he had been. When he named the creek, Mrs. Crane grew white as a ghost, and sat down.

The man and woman looked at each other a moment without speaking. Then they knew that the same unspoken fear had been in the minds of both.

The toll-gate keeper fortified himself with a much-needed breakfast, and set out once more on his search for the missing girl. His wife remained at home to take his place, and to wait with intent, strained senses for the slight figure that never came.

It was almost dark when Abijah returned for the last time. He had been home occasionally through the day, and the same question and the same hopeless answer had been in the face of the man and woman when they met.

Mrs. Abijah Crane's worst enemy could hardly have desired a sharper punishment for her than the night that followed.

Benjamin Mavis had arrived in the nick of time.

Early that morning the fact that Lenox was missing had first got abroad in Cherry Hollows. It had already made a sensation in the secluded little valley town. Men and boys were searching the woods, and others were talking of dragging the river below the dam. Before sunset the story, with all the excitement of the search, would have spread like wild-fire through the country. Several of the neighbors, from various motives of curiosity or sympathy, had come in to offer their services to Mrs. Crane.

At the sound of the wheels, the toll-gate keeper presented himself at the door. He was always on the look-out for Lenox. His solemn face did not brighten on seeing young Mavis, who, he fancied, would be the last person to have any knowledge of her.

"We are in great trouble here!" was his salutation.

He was sure to avail himself of any opportunity of confiding his griefs to a listener.

"I expected as much," answered Ben, in a not very sympathetic tone.

The reply startled Abijah. It was anything but the sort he had looked for. He stood still, staring in silence a moment, then grasped the young man's arm and burst out: "Do you know anything about our lost girl?"

"I will answer that question to your wife first," answered Ben. "She is, I believe, the sole authority under this roof!"

It was hard on Abijah, but he was rather pachydermatous at best. In his surprise and eagerness a sharper thrust would not have penetrated very deeply.

Ben Mavis had a very young man's supreme contempt for a hen-pecked husband.

It created quite a sensation when the stalwart-limbed youth presented himself among the half dozen women in Mrs. Crane's sitting-room.

In his excitement, Abijah presented the stranger to his wife in the abruptest fashion: "Here's a young man wants to see you, Abigail!"

The woman was on her feet in an instant. There was a ghastly look on her thin, dark-skinned face; her black eyes, with the yellow rings around them, which two sleepless nights and an awful dread had planted there, seemed ready to start from their sockets as she gasped out, between hope and dread, "Have you come to bring me any tidings of Lenox Dare?"

Her look, her tone, would have touched most people; but Ben Mavis's soft heart was just now hard as a nether mill-stone toward the trembling woman before him.

"I have come to tell you, Mrs. Crane," he said, in the breathless silence that followed, "that I left Lenox Dare this morning under my mother's roof. She is very ill, and threatened with brain-fever, from all she has lately undergone. But she is with friends who have the power and the will to take care of her."

As he said this, the youth looked strong enough and brave enough to defend anything lonely and helpless. The women grouped around Mrs. Crane felt a strong access of respect for Lenox Dare. The fact that one has somebody to take one's part will

have an immense influence on minds of a certain type.

In the sudden relief from her worst fears Mrs. Crane sank down on a chair, her trembling lips unable to utter a word.

Abijah and the neighbors crowded around the young man with questions. He told them, in his simple, straightforward fashion, how Lenox had come to them two nights before.

There was nothing strange in her doing this, he said. His grandfather had been Colonel Marvell's friend, and he himself had told her this in his late visit. It was natural that the old man's niece, driven from her home, should go where friends and pity awaited her, though she had to drag herself thirty miles on foot to find them.

This speech brought Mrs. Crane, white and shaking, to her feet.

She had never driven Lenox from her door, she asserted. She had always been good to her. All her neighbors would bear witness to that; and she looked from one to another, expecting they would corroborate her words.

In the little group of women were several who, at her late tea-drinking, had been loudest in their denunciations of Lenox; but not one of these had now the courage to say a word for Mrs. Crane. The tide of opinion had set strongly in the absent girl's favor.

Ben's time had come now. He had been waiting for it.

"Do you call it kindness, Mrs. Crane," he asked, looking steadily into the eyes of the trembling wo-

man, "to drive a young, delicate girl like Lenox Dare into a great, noisy, crowded factory, to toil from morning till night? Do you call your cruelty kindness, when you saw the torture you were inflicting, and refused to listen, though she begged you to take pity on her? and though you knew all the time she would have inherited a little fortune from her uncle had you not beguiled the old man, in his dotage, into marrying you?"

This peroration was like the crash of a thunderbolt. Nothing but the thought of Lenox Dare's pitiful little face could have made Ben Mavis talk like that to a woman. There was a dead silence as he turned and left the room.

Before he had started off, the toll-gate keeper shuffled up to the wagon.

"Give my love to Lenox," he said, "and tell her I'm glad if she's got into clover! *She* knows I al'ays was her friend at heart. Hadn't you better stop and take some of her clothes along?"

"No, thank you," answered Ben. His wrath had spent itself in his last charge. "Lenox Dare's friends will see that she has everything she wants. Good-day, sir." He wheeled his light wagon around, and was out of sight in a few moments.

CHAPTER VI.

HOME.

IT was late in the forenoon when Lenox Dare awoke from her long sleep. Mrs. Mavis, in her own room, on the watch for the slightest movement, was at the bedside in a moment. The great, dark eyes stared at her out of the little shadowy face. It was worth while for any hunted creature, spent in the flight, beaten down by the storms, to be welcomed back to life and hope with such a smile, with such a tender, cheery voice.

“Well, my dear, you have been doing bravely! Fifteen hours of sleep ought to make you as good as new!”

Lenox seemed in no hurry to answer. Her brain coming out of that long, dreamless slumber, in which it had been drowned for hours, was a good deal dazed. Her eyes went with a languid sort of wonder around the room, took in all its pretty belongings, its pink chintz and white draperies, and then came back to Mrs. Mavis, on whom they rested with a wistful, questioning glare.

“Well, my child, you know who it is?” asked again that bright, tender voice.

“Yes, you are Ben Mavis’s mother.” It was a low, fluttering tone, as though it cost an effort.

"That is true. But I want to be something to you, too, my dear!" and the cheery voice faltered a little.

"What do you want to be to me?" asked Lenox, with a faint wonder in her weary tones.

"Oh, some body very nice and thoughtful, that will take care of you, and make you happy, and see that your heart is as light as the robins that sing away the summer in our orchard. Isn't that something you would like me to be?"

Mrs. Mavis saw again that wistful, questioning glare. Then a sudden tremor went over Lenox's face. "Is that *mothering*?" she cried out sharply. "He told me you said that was what I needed — what you wanted to do to me!"

"My poor little lambkin," said Mrs. Mavis, with the tears running down her cheeks now, "that is just what it means. Now you have come to me, and given me a chance to show you, you shall find out what it is like."

Then all of a sudden, Lenox burst out into a wild, wailing cry: "I never had any mothering!" she sobbed. "Nobody ever showed me what it was like!"

Mrs. Mavis did not answer with any words. She could not. Her soul was melted with pity, as she stood by the bedside stroking Lenox's hair, with her soft mother-touch, while that wild crying had its way — tore itself out from the girl's heart in sobs that shook her like a leaf in summer gales.

The storm did the girl good. It was like the breaking up of winter-locked streams at the blowing of the

south wind. During the last week she had hardly shed a tear. After a long time she grew quieter. Mrs. Mavis seized her first chance. Her instincts taught her not to interfere with this wild weeping. They also showed her at this critical juncture that it would be wisest to treat recent events in a straightforward, matter-of-fact fashion. Lenox's mind and nerves had been through a terrible strain. Her imagination would have a strong tendency to live over just the harrowing scenes through which she had passed. Until all morbid fancies were dispelled her recovery would be hopeless.

With this feeling uppermost, Mrs. Mavis spoke now: "You have shown yourself the wisest, bravest girl in the world, Lenox! You knew who were your friends; you came straight to them in your trouble. It was a long, hard way, I know; but that is to be thought of no more; indeed, we are all of us now to have but one thought about this whole matter."

Lenox asked with her eyes only what Mrs. Mavis meant. The girl lay with flushed, wet cheeks, quite worn out with her weeping.

"That thought is that you were coming home!" answered Mrs. Mavis, with tender earnestness. "And what the home is—you are to make haste and get well, and find out."

"Am I never to go back to Cherry Hollows—to Mrs. Crane—to that dreadful Factory?" asked Lenox, and again the terror was in the poor child's eyes and voice.

Mrs. Mavis took the thin brown fingers in her own. "Lenox," she said, her voice thrilled all through

with solemn tenderness, "I promise you before God that you shall never go away from us so long as you live!"

There was a little silence between them. In the stillness they could hear the robins singing outside.

When Mrs. Mavis spoke again, it was with her usual cheery tones. "And now, Lenox, you have but one thing to do. All the rest you may safely leave to us."

"What is that?" asked Lenox.

"You are to help yourself to get well. That will not be very hard work, will it?" and she smiled.

"I will try," said Lenox, softly.

Mrs. Mavis wished the little, sad face would have ever so faintly reflected her smile, but she thought to herself, "That will come in time."

Then she brought water and bathed the flushed face, and the girl came up, with a little waiter that held the most tempting breakfast; and Lenox, propped on her pillows, ate a few morsels from the old-fashioned china, and the doctor came in with something about his white hair, and shrewd old face, that made her think of Colonel Marvell. She liked his brisk, pleasant air, and she would have laughed at his jokes, if she could have laughed at anything in the world. He told Mrs. Mavis, privately, that the child was tiding over the danger. She was in the right hands, and as for the look on her face which hurt Mrs. Mavis — she must have patience, and some day, all of a sudden, she would see it break up, and clear away forever!

A little before nightfall Benjamin Mavis reached

home. His gray mare, with the light buggy, had made wonderful time from Cherry Hollows. Ben related the whole scene at the toll-gate keeper's to his much interested mother. She secretly rejoiced over his terrible charge on Mrs. Crane, and said, with a little, half-exultant laugh, as she surveyed the manly youth: "Well, Ben, she deserved every word; but I never supposed it was in you to say all that to a woman."

"A fellow doesn't know what is in him, mother, until he's seen what I did, when that poor child came staggering up our walk, and stretched out her hands to me with that pitiful cry. But," added Ben, getting up, throwing down his whip, and striding excitedly about the room, "I hope another time the Fates will send me some more valiant foe than a cross-grained, addle-pated, hysterical old woman!"

In a little while he went up to Lenox. Her face brightened when he came in. She did not know where he had been that day, but Mrs. Mavis had insisted that a statement of the facts would, in the end, prove best for Lenox; and in this instance, too, she had carried her point, rather in the teeth of her son's wishes.

Lenox gave a little scared cry when she learned that Ben had just returned from the toll-gate keeper's.

"Why, my dear," said the voice, whose softness might have soothed a startled infant, and, as she spoke, Mrs. Mavis seated herself on the edge of the bed, "nothing has happened to give you an anxious thought. Ben went to Cherry Hollows for your sake; and he has shown everybody there that you

have a brave knight to defend you. I really am proud of him! Come, Ben, tell our little girl your story!"

Ben told it. Lenox drank in every word. She could understand a little better than anybody else the terrible blow Ben Mavis's last remark must have been to Mrs. Crane. When he had finished, she found it was a relief to know that her fate was no longer a mystery at the toll-gate.

Not that Lenox would ever have felt that she owed Mrs. Crane any apologies for her flight. The woman, in her ill-tempered moods, had often told the girl the only possible favor she could do her would be to take herself out of her sight forever.

But Lenox could see now how wisely Mrs. Mavis had acted in this whole matter.

She had a peaceful night, and peaceful, restful days and nights followed. Sheltered in that happy, soft-lined nest of a home, Lenox Dare's life-forces slowly rallied. The threatened brain-fever was averted. The change was very gradual, proving how long and terrible the strain had been on the poor girl's mind and body.

She saw no one outside the family except the doctor, and slept a great deal of the time, which, he declared, did her more good than all his remedies; but her sad eyes made Mrs. Mavis's heart ache. Long afterward, Lenox Dare said to her, speaking of that time: "It may take a little while to get used even to Heaven. Everything at first will be so changed!"

Just a week from the day on which she had come

to them Ben took the girl down-stairs, in his arms, and laid her on a lounge under the wide-roofed piazza. Flowering creepers hung thick about the columns ; but between these was a magnificent view of the country.

The Mavis cottage, wide and low, and gray and gabled, stood on the summit of a great pasture-clothed height. Below it the old town of Briarswild led its peaceful life among the hills and valleys of one of the finest agricultural counties in the heart of New York State. No railroad branch from the Central or the Erie had thus far penetrated its quiet. The principal street of Briarswild was almost a mile from the great Mavis farm. It seemed to Lenox as though the whole world could be seen from that piazza. The rich meadow lands, the shining river, the scattered farm-houses, the villages gleaming white against the summer greenery, the noble and beautiful forms of the hills on the horizon, made up the varied picture on which the girl gazed for the first time, on which her eyes were to dwell for years with something of her first wonder and delight.

It was a sultry, breezeless morning in the valleys, but a soft wind blew upon the hills. Lenox lay upon the lounge and gazed away into the distance, and a still brightness grew upon her face like light from behind a cloud, and the two — the mother and son — watched the girl silently. That was the first light Mrs. Mavis had ever seen in her face.

Lenox lay a long time, not speaking a word, but drinking in, with lips a little apart, the noble view. At last she turned to Ben Mavis, who was watching

her as intently as his mother, a little, pleased smile unbent her mouth, and made her face look more childish than ever.

“Did I tell you the truth, Lenox?” he asked, answering her bit of smile with his own bright one. He paid her each day a brief visit. That was all the doctor or his mother, fearing the effect of the smallest excitement on the girl, would permit.

“Not one half of it!” she answered fervently. “It makes me believe that the old story of the ‘Happy Islands,’ which lay on the horizon where the sailors could see them at sunset, must have been true after all.”

“That is a wonderfully pretty fancy, my dear,” said Mrs. Mavis. “I never thought of it though. I have had this view before my eyes for more than twenty years.”

While his mother was saying this Ben suddenly started off as though a new idea had struck him. He returned in a little while, leading Dainty close to the piazza.

As soon as Lenox caught sight of the creature a great light came into her face; she lifted her head from the pillows, and stretched out her hands. “Oh, beautiful pony, are you come again?” she cried.

Dainty seemed to know the voice. She bent forward her small head, her quivering ears, and gave a low neigh.

“Oh, Ben, how could you!” said his mother, remonstratingly. “She can never bear it.”

“Yes, she can. I am wiser than you and the doctor this time,” answered the youth, good-naturedly.

Then he turned to Lenox. "You are Dainty's mistress from this hour," he said. "She is your sole property. I've been training her of late. I will trust you for a twenty miles ride on her back as soon as you are able to sit there! Now isn't that a present worth getting well for, Lenox Dare?"

The next instant she was off the lounge — she had rushed across the piazza — she, who, for the last week, had only walked feebly from her bed to her chair — her arms were around Dainty's neck, she was talking to her, stroking her, calling her her own beautiful gray pony!

"Oh, if I could only mount her again — if I could only ride a little way!" she said to Ben, and her eyes rayed out light.

"So you shall!" he replied, catching her excitement.

"Ben, are you gone insane too?" exclaimed his mother.

"You shall answer that question yourself before the hour is out," he rejoined, gaily; and the next instant he had lifted the girl and set her on the colt's back. The slight figure swayed a moment, and then sat erect, in the soft, pink robe that had been made, long ago, for a little, rosy-cheeked maiden, years younger than Lenox.

As Dainty stepped lightly off under Ben's careful guiding, Lenox laughed. What a glad, ringing laugh it was!

Mrs. Mavis stood and watched the pair like one spell-bound. This sudden change in Lenox seemed to her like a miracle. She was so astonished that she

could hardly tell whether she was glad or frightened.

They went up the road at least half a mile before they turned back. Dainty behaved admirably. She seemed to understand the situation, to accept her new mistress, as she stepped proudly along, her eyes glancing, her neck arching proudly under that light weight.

“To think it is my very own horse!” said Lenox to Ben, as he walked by her side, with one hand in Dainty’s gray mane. “What made you think of giving her to me?”

“Oh, I thought you had fairly earned her by that wonderful talk of yours the day you first saw her!”

The next instant Ben could have bitten his tongue out for that speech. He saw the cloud darken Lenox’s face; he knew what old, harrowing associations had revived in her mind.

“If it had not been for Dainty, I should not be here to day!” she said, gravely.

“You’re not once to think of that, Lenox,” he said. “You’re only to think about the glorious times you are to have with her.”

She smiled at him then. Her smile reflected a great many things in her heart and brain at that moment.

“How good you are! What am I to call you?” she ended, abruptly.

“Why, Ben, of course. As though I could have any other name for you, Lenox!”

“Well, then, how good you are — Ben!”

Lenox came back with flushed cheeks and radiant

eyes. It did not seem as though she could be the same girl they had brought down-stairs that morning. When she alighted, she went straight to Mrs. Mavis; she put her arms around the woman's neck, and clung there.

"Oh, I am so happy!" she cried. "I am going to get well. I am almost that now. It has all come to me at once!"

It was the first time Lenox Dare had caressed anybody since old Colonel Marvell died.

Just such soft arms had once clung about Mrs. Mavis's neck, while a girlish voice cooed loving words in her ear. The touch, the speech, went now to her heart of hearts. She folded her arms about the orphan.

"You shall be happy, my child," she said, and her tender voice faltered. "You shall be — my little girl, Lenox!"

After this Lenox Dare took her place quietly and naturally in the household. The lonely, misjudged orphan soon grew used to kindest care and daily love.

In this new, blessed home-atmosphere, in the warmth and light about her, her chilled, half-stunted girlhood sent out vigorous shoots on every side. She thrived like some plant which feels the sun and the soft winds about its roots, and waves its gay blossoms joyfully in its native air.

Lenox Dare was no longer the silent, absorbed girl she had been at Cherry Hollows. She was full of eager, bounding life, of joyful interest in the things about her. Many of her little oddities and peculiarities slipped lightly off her, as the calyx slips off

from the expanding flower. In the new home there was, of course, much for her to learn ; but Mrs. Mavis was the gentlest of teachers ; and Lenox Dare's instincts made it easy for her to adopt the graces and refinements of the new life about her.

The years that followed were a time of quiet growth and development. Lenox lived to be thankful, long afterward, that the change in her fortune had not been at this time of a more ambitious kind. A long, peaceful, sunny period intervened between her past and a future of which she could have no faint anticipations.

She could not perceive, either, except in the dimmest way, what life and brightness she brought with her to the gray gabled-cottage that crowned the great Mavis farm, the largest in the county.

The owner had died suddenly, in his prime, six years before. Three years later Janet, his one little daughter, had followed her father ; so there was a vacant place awaiting Lenox by the hearthstone and in the hearts of those to whom she had fled.

Ben, just ready to enter college, had been quite too young when his father died to assume the charge of the great farm. He had, even now, only a general supervision of the land and laborers, and was kept sufficiently busy ; but his mother insisted that his young manhood should not be burdened with care and toil.

“ Better the land should never yield another harvest, Ben, than that you should grow old before your time,” she said, gazing with tender eyes on her stalwart boy.

Mrs. Mavis was one of those women who have the art of making a home delightful. Her *cuisine* had long enjoyed a reputation throughout the country. Every room in the house showed in all its simple appointments her tasteful handiwork, her fine eye for bright, harmonious colors.

The flower-beds in her front yard were all summer one sea of varied bloom; and flowers, and birds, and mosses, and leaves that held all their autumn glow, gave to the interior of the cottage an air of summer through the longest winter day.

Mrs. Mavis found a great satisfaction in arranging Lenox's new wardrobe. It was strangely like her old habit of preparing the dead Janet's garments. It seemed as though the new clothes had almost as much effect on the girl's looks as her new happiness. But both wrought an immense change. In a short time very few people would have recognized Lenox Dare for the girl that went that hot July morning to gather blackberries in the pastures of Cherry Hollows. She began to see company, to meet girls of her own age. Her shyness gradually wore off. She found, to her immense surprise, that people listened, interested and amused, to her talk. But she had no idea what a perpetual surprise and delight her freshness, her quaintness, her joyous spirits were to those who were constantly with her.

Of course people were curious about her sudden advent at the Mavis farm; but the story of the old friendship between the families explained matters as easily at Briarswild as at Cherry Hollows.

It seemed that a queen might lay off her crown,

and turn her back on all her palace-splendors, to dwell in that warm, bright, home atmosphere; and there, in a little while, sheltered and happy, loving and beloved, Lenox Dare took the place of the dead, and became the young daughter of the house.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO BUSINESS.

IT was more than two years since Robert Beresford painted his picture in Cherry Hollows Glen. It was more than two months since his marriage with Stacey Meredith. Her father's illness, which so abruptly summoned her from her lover's side, proved a long, and at last a fatal one.

The dead banker had been regarded by all the world as a rich man. To everybody's immense surprise he died insolvent. Stacey was his only daughter. She had been brought up with the habits and tastes of a wealthy heiress. She came a portionless bride to Robert Beresford. He and his young sister had inherited a handsome fortune from their dead father. At the time of the elder man's death, his son was a mere stripling at college. The orphans were the last of their race. After he had graduated at Harvard young Beresford went abroad and studied awhile in Germany; but his artistic tastes, of which he had given evidence in early boyhood, soon drew him to Italy, where he spent the best part of three happy years in his studies and his work.

Meanwhile, the family property, the inheritance of several generations, was rapidly melting away.

Guardians and trustees had the management of it, while the young owner spent his time over his canvases, or studied in the famous picture-galleries of the world the works of the masters. Robert Beresford had no concern about his fortune, which he took for granted was in good hands so long as his dividends reached him promptly. Even after his return home he had no inkling of the real state of his affairs. He had fallen in love; he had courted and at last married the woman of his choice; he had taken her to the Beresford homestead — the old, square, stone mansion, in the midst of its ample, cultivated grounds, where he had spent his happy boyhood.

He had, all this time, no suspicion that the foundations of his fortune were crumbling beneath him. The thunderbolt fell in a moment out of a clear sky. The newly-married pair had returned only the week before from their bridal tour to their home. This was in one of the picturesque old towns that cluster around Boston — so near that they feel the pulsation of the mighty city's heart, so far off that an air of Eden-like repose and peace invests them.

Here young Beresford learned one day that the two men who had had for years the principal control of his fortune, whom he and his father had trusted with absolute confidence, were bankrupts. Then the whole truth came to light. These men had betrayed his interests, and used his funds to advance their own fortunes. A large part of the property had been swallowed up in rash and ruinous speculations. The managers had sought in these desperate ventures to retrieve themselves, and to conceal the real nature

of their transactions from young Beresford. The story is quite too long, and, alas ! quite too common to enlarge on here. The dullest imagination can supply all the details. They involved not only the principal managers, but others, who, in various ways, having some interest in young Beresford's affairs, had tampered with their trust. Some had been only weak where others had been dishonest ; but the result was that Robert Beresford was wakened suddenly from his dreams of young love and his ardent ambitions to find himself, with the habits which a youth of wealth and ease had made second nature, with his luxuriously-reared wife and young sister on his hands, and with his fortunes in such ruinous plight that it was doubtful whether he could save even the old Beresford homestead from the general wreck.

Before young Beresford could fully realize his changed fortunes, an old friend and distant connection of his father's — a shrewd, prosperous business man — came to his rescue. This friend was at the head of a vast iron importing and manufacturing house, which had extensive branches in South America and heavy interests in Europe. He offered young Beresford, whom he had always known, and for whom he had a fatherly liking, the place which his own son, about to take charge of the house in South America, would leave vacant. This would involve a partnership in the business, a steady devotion of time and thought to its interests. The position would secure Beresford an income that would relieve him from all pecuniary anxieties for the present. It would probably, in the next twenty years, insure him a fortune equal to the one which he had lost.

Young Beresford understood all the advantages of this offer; he knew that it was one that does not come, in crises like this, to one man in a million.

“Come, my dear boy,” said his father’s old friend, arguing with the true commercial genius, “throw your paint-boxes and your pictures, and all that sort of thing, to the dogs, and settle down to some real work in life. Make money, instead of idling and dreaming. You’ve got the true Beresford grit in you, and it only needed a few hard knocks to bring it to the surface.”

The young man looked at the older one as he said this. He took in, with his artist instinct, the hard business head, the shrewd, worldly-wise face lighted up now by some unusual kindliness.

Would he, one of these days, be just such a hard, cool-headed old Philistine? he wondered. But he answered: “Give me until to-morrow to think over your offer, Mr. Wentworth. You shall have my answer at that time. As for my thanks — the man who has just proposed to me all you have, will wait for those, too.”

“I see! The young fellow has a hankering after his paint-boxes and canvases,” said the old man, after the younger had left his office. “But there’s sound stuff at bottom. I’ll trust that to bring him out right at last. Of course it will be tough on him at first; but he’s a fine fellow, and a lucky young dog, and if he once knuckles down to business the nonsense will soon be taken out of him.”

Robert Beresford went out that night to his home, less than a dozen miles from Boston, with a feeling

that a great crisis had come in his life, that his future would be shaped and colored by the choice which he must now make. He did not go as usual to his young wife on his return ; he went up a single flight of stairs in the large, old-fashioned mansion, and turned to a room on the right. It was his studio.

The young man paced up and down this room with feelings into which, I suppose, an artist could alone fully enter. Since he returned from Italy, three years ago, this room had been to him the dearest place in the world. Its ample space, its fine light, its stores of old, rare and beautiful things, made it the beau-ideal of an artist's studio. The young owner had gathered here a world of treasures — things that in his wide travels had struck his fancy, or held some old historic association in his thoughts.

Persian rugs lay on the floor, and mediæval tapestries hung on the walls or in the corners. Rich fabrics, gorgeous stuffs, blazed on chairs and lounges. Antiques, vases, rare and precious specimens of pottery from all schools, bore witness to their owner's culture and taste. Between these walls, in the midst of these treasures which kindled his imagination and inspired his thoughts, Robert Beresford had hoped to spend the best years — to do the real work of his life. The portfolios that lay on an old carved table of black wood were full of memoranda, to be worked up afterward into noble form and beautiful color. These had been gathered everywhere, with the patient, loving temper of the artist. Work in water-color, in oils, and in all sorts of stages, lay around. In one place hung an almost completed study of

tossing waves, and wet, brown rocks, and dripping weeds, and crumbling pier. Close by it was a more ambitious study of a mountain-slope, with the glitter of sunlight on its lofty pines, and the glow of a crimson sunset on its crest. There were some pretty, half-finished pictures in *genre* lying about. These had cost Robert Beresford that something which work always costs any true artist — which pen cannot write nor tongue utter. In the middle of the room stood a large, new, oak easel, only a few days before the gift of his friend and college chum, Jack Leith. He had never used it yet. Was he never to use it, after all?

Robert Beresford asked himself this question as he paced up and down the room, and heard the low, dreary cry of the autumn wind outside. It seemed to the young man that he should hear the cry of that wind at times through all his life. He had come here as the fittest place to make the resolve on which his future hinged. Should he close with his old friend's offer? Should he turn his back on all the hopes and dreams of his young manhood? Could he force himself to settle down, like most of his kind, into a mere money-grubber? Could he spend his life in an ignoble struggle after the poor prizes and ambitions of the world?

In this way Robert Beresford put the question to his soul that night. For himself there could have been but one answer. He would have counted no sacrifice too great for his art.

A Bohemian life had certain attractions for a temperament like his. In his young pride and strength he would not have regarded the loss of his property

as a very serious misfortune. He would have taken the chances with his art.

It was only the thought of his wife that made young Beresford hesitate. Could he ask the beautiful, delicately-reared woman to share his struggle and his poverty? He knew enough of the awards of art to see that the sacrifice must be a long one; that it would involve all sorts of limitations and economies for the woman who had bound up her fate with his. Could he lay such burdens on her slight shoulders? All his manhood, all his high, knightly spirit recoiled at the thought.

Young Beresford had won praise for his work in high quarters, both at home and abroad. In Paris exhibitions, in London academies, his pictures had been studied and admired for their graceful sentiment, for some rare qualities in conception and execution. This might have intoxicated weaker brains. But Robert Beresford was wise enough to see that all these things did not prove him a great artist. Perhaps, he reasoned, the world would not lose anything if he never painted another picture. Could he have been assured in that hour of doubt and wavering that he had proved himself a genius there could have been no further question with him. The world would have had its claim on him. In that case, even those he loved must take their chances with his art. But Robert Beresford told himself — what a good many critics would have disputed — that he had thus far shown himself only a clever artist. If he were more than this it would take years to prove it; and, meanwhile, there was his wife, there was his young sister also, whose fortunes had been wrecked with his own!

He stopped in his walk when he heard a soft knock at the door. He turned, and saw a lovely vision standing there with a smile on its lips, and a bewitching archness in its eyes.

"Am I getting to be an old story, Robert," asked the young wife, half gayly, half seriously, "that you come first to your studio instead of to me?"

"You could not ask such a question and be in earnest, Stacey," he said, going to her and leading her into the room.

"Well, then, must I be jealous of your pictures?"

"When I have not touched a canvas since our marriage!"

But Robert, I feel that something is the matter. Is it that trouble you told me about yesterday?"

He had hinted lightly and rapidly as possible of some disturbance in his business affairs; but he had left her mostly in the dark regarding his fallen fortunes. Now the truth must come.

"There is more of that trouble. Look at me! Your husband is a poor man, Stacey Beresford!"

She was standing close by his side, with one little, soft hand on his arm. She looked startled, bewildered.

"O, Robert, what do you mean? What dreadful thing has happened to you?" she cried out.

"It is a long story, Stacey; so long that we will not go into its details now. I have been the victim of weakness and wickedness, of selfishness and fraud. My fortune has melted away in dishonest hands, until it has all vanished."

"Is poverty a very bad thing, Robert?" asked the young wife, gravely.

“Very bad, you ignorant little woman. Of course it has different stages, and very different meanings to different people; but it involves at best limitations and privations, constant small worries and wearisome economies. I must honestly tell you, Stacey, I think poverty would be to you and to me, because of you, a very bad thing.”

Stacey Beresford lifted her golden-lashed, violet eyes to her husband, and looked steadily in his face.

“Robert, my husband,” she said, “I am not afraid of this poverty. I would rather share it with you, bear its burdens and make its sacrifices, than be the wife of any other man, though he owned the world!”

As she said this, her eyes gazing at him with proud tenderness, and the soft pink in her cheeks deepening to the reddest rose, Robert Beresford made up his mind.

“Stacey,” he said, in his tone a solemn, tender depth which she had never heard there before, “please God, you shall never know what this poverty is. I have a man’s strong brain, a man’s stout arm. You may trust them.”

“But what are you going to do, Robert?” and as she asked the question, her look said that she believed there was nothing in the world that this man, so grand in his courage, so gentle in his tenderness, so great above all other men, could not do.

“This am I going to do!” answered Robert Beresford, and then he told his wife of the offer Josiah Wentworth had made him that afternoon.

She drank in every word. When he had ceased speaking her gaze went slowly about the studio.

"But, Robert," she said, with a woman's quick intuition, "will you have to give up your pictures if you go into this business? I know what your painting is to you."

"Whatever it is to me, I am not sure it could ever have made me a great artist, Stacey." He tried to speak lightly, but, despite himself, his voice broke a little.

Stacey's quick ear caught the sound. "I see how it is," she said, with quivering lips, and eyes suddenly dimmed with tears. "You are going to sacrifice yourself, your dearest work, your noblest hopes, for my sake, Robert."

"I am going to take care of the woman I married!" said Robert Beresford, and though his voice was tender, there was a ring of fixed purpose in it, and he set his jaws sternly.

"I never cared much when poor papa lost his money," said Stacey, very seriously. "I knew I had *you*, Robert. Now I wish, for your sake, I had the fortune."

When she said that, Robert Beresford put out his arms and drew his wife to him.

"For better or for worse," he repeated. "No woman having said that for me, shall find it was for the worse."

That night Robert Beresford gathered up his unfinished pictures, and his crowded portfolios, and carried them, with the great oak easel, into a small room that opened out of his studio. There were tears in his eyes—the bitterest they had ever held. He dared not, at this crisis, reveal his purpose to any of

his friends, lest their remonstrances should shake it. When his work was done it seemed to him that he had slain the best part of himself.

It was years before Robert Beresford sat down again before the oak easel. He felt then that it was too late for him ever to paint a great picture.

The next day Beresford went into the private office of Josiah Wentworth and said to him, "I have made up my mind to accept your offer."

The words, few, and to the point, pleased the old man's keen business instincts. "Bravo!" he said, grasping the younger's hand, while his shrewd face actually beamed on him. "I knew you'd see where your interests lay, and let the pictures go. True Beresford grit!"

But the young man was not so sure of that. Indeed, it seemed to him at that moment that he was not sure of anything in the world except the shining in Stacey's eyes last night.

When his brother painters learned that Robert Beresford had entered into partnership with the great iron concern they, said a born artist had "gone to the wall!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE PINE WOODS.

IT was now almost three years since Lenox Dare came to Briarswild. Nothing very remarkable had happened during this time. It had been to her one of quiet home happiness, and healthful development. Long before this she had grown quite accustomed to being cared for and petted, to finding herself a central object of interest to those about her. It is wonderful how naturally and easily the saddest of us take our happiness when it comes — as though it were, after all, the human creature's birthright. In the atmosphere of her new home the girl's real nature opened itself. What a joyous, magnetic creature she was! How full of youth, of intense enjoyment, of bright, inspiring presence! If she were gone from the cottage for a few hours they missed her as though half the life had vanished. She still had her old passion for nature, her love of books; but she no longer indulged these to the exclusion of everything else. Mrs. Mavis could not conceive that a young girl was properly brought up who had never been to school. It was a miracle, she said to Ben, that the girl had managed to glean such an amount of knowledge from old Colonel Marvell's library; but, for all that, and

for all her unquestionable superiority to other girls of her age, Mrs. Mavis set her heart on Lenox's attending Briarswild Academy.

There was something to be learned in school outside of books, the sensible little woman averred, and so Lenox went to the morning recitations for two years.

This surrounding her with young life and with girls of her own age was a wholesome experience for her. She shrank from her school life at first, but, in a little while, she enjoyed it immensely. It was wonderful how soon she overtook and outstripped her schoolfellows in the studies where she had been far behind them. Her wide range of general literature was to them something marvellous. She was a favorite with her young companions, and had her schoolgirl friendships, which perhaps did her quite as much good as her lessons.

During these years Ben Mavis and Lenox Dare had been thrown constantly together, not only under the home-roof, but in all their varied, out-door expeditions. They had here the deepest likings in common, and the pure-souled, frank-hearted youth, and the maiden, joyous and radiant as the summer morning, were off almost every day on some adventure.

Ben taught Lenox a world of things in which young girls are apt to be sadly deficient; taught her to ride, to drive, to row, to swim, to fire a pistol, to send an arrow straight to its target. Mrs. Mavis sometimes demurred a little at these masculine sports; but, in the end, Ben always had his way.

It was late in the afternoon of a lovely June day

when Dainty brought her young mistress across the old creek-bridge, from which the road led up through half a mile of pine woods to the lane at the back of the Mavis farm.

Lenox had been down into the town that afternoon on some errand, and then, beguiled by the beauty of the day, had spurred off among the hills, and made a wide detour on her return. As she came dashing across the creek, horse and rider made a striking picture. Lenox had profited by Ben's training; but, then, he often assured her, she was a born horse-woman. She sat her young mare admirably. Her slight, girlish figure harmonized with Dainty's small, graceful build, with the arching neck and the proudly borne head.

The folds of Lenox's dark green riding-skirt floated against Dainty's gray mane. She wore the dress and the little velvet cap with the solitary black plume for the first time. They were a present from Mrs. Mavis the day before. She took delight in seeing the girl prettily dressed.

Nobody could have suspected Lenox was the girl who, three years ago that summer, had leaned over the fence and gazed into the depths of Cherry Hollows Glen. Her cheeks had rounded, and the little peaked face had changed its shy, wistful look, and was full of life and happiness. Her great, dark eyes shone like suns that afternoon with the thoughts that had come to quicken heart and brain in her long, solitary ride. She had only crossed the bridge, and struck into the shadows of the pine road, when a voice called her. She drew Dainty up, and in an instant

the creature stood quite still, though her eyes flashed, and her small limbs quivered.

The next moment Ben Mavis burst out from the shadow of the pines, with a laugh. He, too, had grown a little stouter and taller in these years, and the face under his broad-brimmed straw hat had grown handsomer and manlier, without losing any of its bright frankness.

"Ah, Lenox," he said, coming up to the saddle, with a merry glance, "you and Dainty have been at your old tricks — running off again."

"I couldn't help it, Ben," replied Lenox, with a bird-like flutter of her restless head. "I had the best intentions of coming straight home when I set out, but it was just impossible. There never was quite such a day before! It drew me away into the hills. Such a ride as I and Dainty have had by Moose Bend, and through Berry Gap. It was" — hesitating a moment — "indescribable!"

"Your eyes describe it all," said Ben, gazing at the glowing face as he stroked Dainty's mane. "They shine like stars!"

"That must be because I have had such a grand time! How long have you been waiting for me, Ben?"

"Oh, a quarter of an hour, perhaps. I knew, you see, however good your intentions might be, that when you once got on Dainty's back the air, the light, and the perfect day, would run away with you. We ought to understand each other pretty well by this time, Lenox!"

"After seeing each other a good part of every day

for almost three years!" she answered with a little merry laugh; and then a swift change came over her face. She flung her arms around Dainty's neck. Ben knew perfectly what was in her thought. She never forgot what a share that young horse had borne in her fortunes.

But Cherry Hollows was not often alluded to at the Mavis cottage. It was partly for the sake of diverting her thoughts that Ben said, "So you had a glorious time skylarking off by yourself among the hills!"

Lenox unclasped her arms, and the slight girlish figure sat erect in the saddle. Her eyes — all their darkness filled with beautiful light — suddenly shone on him. "It was not all 'skylarking,' she said. "Oh, Ben," leaning forward a little so that the young delicate profile shone out clear under its crown of dark hair, "I learned something about you this afternoon!"

"About me!" he asked, switching off with a stick some dandelions which showed their golden heads among the pine-matting at his feet.

"Yes," Lenox continued, "I had brought Dainty up to the trough where Berry Road forks when the woman who lives in that little yellow box of a house came to the door and spoke to me. She talked to me for the next ten minutes, with the tears in her eyes, about you."

"She had better, by a long odds, hold her tongue!" growled Ben.

"It is like you, Ben Mavis, to say that. But the woman's gratitude was very touching. She says you have saved her boy to her in more ways than one."

This time Ben did not reply. He looked about for some more dandelions in the soft brown matting.

"The woman says," continued Lenox, "that her son has not touched a drop of anything stronger than water since *that* day. Oh, Ben, it was a noble deed — it was grand, heroic!"

This time the young man flushed to the roots of his hair. "Girls always do pile on the adjectives so!" he exclaimed.

"They don't always have as good reason for doing it though," replied Lenox. "And you never told, even your mother!"

"What was the use of giving her a scare when the danger was all over?"

"But you ought to think of her before you risk your life again to save another."

"If I had stopped to think the fellow would have been in eternity! My mother's son had better show his pluck, if it cost him his life, than go about a coward in a whole skin!"

All the girl — all the dawning woman in Lenox, felt the manly ring of this speech. But before she could answer, young Mavis went on, "I suppose you may as well have the story from me, now it will be in everybody's mouth. I had got around the street corner with my buggy when I heard the sound of cracking timbers. I knew that the scaffolding of the new block that was going up on the right was giving way. I caught sight of the fellow lying there. I knew an instant later he would be a mass of jelly. It was all done in a flash. I was out of the buggy, had the fellow in my arms, and had cleared the danger,

when the crash came. Don't look like that, Lenox ! It was a risk, I know ; but I saved the fellow's life, and got off without a scratch."

"The woman said not one man in a thousand would have had the courage to do it," said Lenox.

"I can't answer for other men," replied Ben. "I only hope the fellow will prove worth saving. The crash woke him ; the scare sobered him. I carried him home and talked to him on the way like a grandfather."

"I am glad that your mother has not heard a syllable of it," added Lenox.

"You won't be glad long," answered Ben, grimly. "She will be sure to have a highly colored version from some busybody. That's the worst of it. Let us talk of something else."

"About my Virgil, for instance," replied Lenox. "Do you know I have not translated a line of our last lesson ?"

"Virgil to the dogs !" cried Ben.

Lenox's laugh rang out gaily. "We began with such good intentions, Ben," she said. "It was to be an hour's Latin every evening, you remember, inexorable as some old law of the Medes and Persians. Your mother predicted it would all end in just this fashion."

Ben laughed, and arched his brows. "It is not the first time her predictions have proved true," he said.

While the youth and the maiden were having their talk in the old bridle-path, the late summer-afternoon light glimmered about Lenox's girlish figure, and glanced on Dainty's gray mane, and made that a silver

cloud, and shone on Ben's frank young face and brown locks. The whole, with the green gloom of the pine woods for a background, had a wonderfully picturesque effect. A third person, listening to the talk of the two, might have been a little puzzled to decide the relationship they bore to each other. Their manner, with all its perfect frankness, was not precisely that of brother and sister. Still less was it like that of lovers. A thought of that sort, it was evident, had never crossed the soul of youth or maiden. But their intercourse had, from the beginning, taken a tone of the frankest, most intimate companionship. In their love of out-door life, of animals, of sports, the young people had a large world of tastes and sympathies in common. They were at a time of life, too, when these tastes and sympathies would be most active. But under all this lay, with Lenox, a passion of gratitude; while Ben, in turn, always felt toward her that sense of tender, protecting care, which first awoke in his soul on the night when he carried the small, drooping figure over the Mavis threshold.

Lenox spoke up suddenly: "I have set my heart on having a game of archery after supper. I must try the new bow you brought me yesterday. I shall want to shoot at a target every day, for the next week at least."

"For the next week!" repeated Ben. "You little suspect where we shall be at the end of that time! We are going somewhere, Lenox — you and mother and I. We are to start within three days. It was all settled while you were up in the woods this afternoon.

I have written to engage rooms. Now, Lenox, where is it we are going?"

As he propounded this riddle Ben folded his arms and looked very solemn, only there was a glint of mischief in his eyes.

"Your mother going too!" exclaimed Lenox. And it is so difficult to persuade her to leave home. Where can it be?"

"But that is precisely what you are to tell me."

"And it is to be good news; I can tell that by your looks."

"Oh, splendid—glorious—the whole gamut of a girl's adjectives!"

Lenox suddenly brought her gauntleted palms together. "We are going to Watkins's Glen!" she cried, triumphantly.

The Mavis farm was less than twenty miles from this famous ravine. Lenox had visited it with her friends the summer before. She had watched the sunlight glancing on the gray cliffs and shimmering cascades. She had listened to the voice of the tumbling waters as they broke, with joyful shout, the solemn gloom of the vast ravine. She had climbed the lofty staircases, and lingered on the fairy bridges that span the chasm. As she lost herself in one vista and another of beauty and grandeur she half believed she had passed into some new world of mystery and enchantment.

Ben Mavis shook his head. "It is at least ten times farther than Watkins's Glen," he said.

She mused a moment. The plume of her little riding-cap waved jauntily in the breeze, the shadows

of the pines flickered over her young, thoughtful face. She turned suddenly and laid her hand on the young man's shoulder. "Tell me, Ben," she said, appealingly.

"We are going — *to the sea!*"

"To the sea!" repeated Lenox, in a half dazed, half awed tone.

"Precisely, Lenox," answered Ben; and then he went on to explain how it had all come about.

His mother had, just after Lenox left the house, received a letter from her husband's sister, who lived in a small village among the Berkshire hills. The letter told a sad story of broken health. The writer had not, since the year her brother died, seen his wife or his son. She wrote now, entreating them to come to her in the lovely June weather.

They had decided to go, and take Lenox with them; but they had arranged to spend a week at Hampton Beach before going into the interior. How simple and matter-of-fact it all sounded as Ben related the programme, whose consummation would an hour ago have appeared to Lenox as remote as going to the moon!

"It is a grand old coast," Ben concluded. "I was there with my father when I was a boy. The beach at low tide is, for miles, smooth as a marble floor. You'll have the ocean in all its glory close to your door. If anything could have made a poet of me, that sight would. You'll be fascinated, too, with the old rocks, where you can gather shells, and sea-weed, and all sorts of curious things the tides have left there. In fine weather you can see from Boar's Head

the Isles of Shoals, like huge black monsters, lifting themselves just above the waves."

"And I am going to see, to hear it all in three days!" said Lenox, still quietly; but there was a vibration in her voice which satisfied Ben.

"Within three days!" he repeated; and then he took hold of Dainty's saddle and walked by her side through the forest ways.

When they reached the big gate they saw Mrs. Mavis on the side piazza.

A moment later Lenox sprang lightly from her horse, and bounded up to the woman.

"O, Mrs. Mavis," she said, putting her arms around the other's neck, "Ben has told me all about it!"

This demonstration was very rare with Lenox — so rare that it always reminded Mrs. Mavis of the time the girl had caressed her that day they brought her out on the piazza for the first time.

"I thought, my dear," she said, laughing, and glancing at the manly youth, "he wouldn't be able to keep the news until you got home."

"And we are really going day after to-morrow, Mrs. Mavis?"

"We are really going, Lenox!"

CHAPTER IX.

HAMPTON BEACH.

ONE morning Lenox Dare sat alone on the highest point of a ledge of low, ragged, gray rocks at Hampton Beach, and watched the tide come in. It was just a week since she and Ben Mavis had had their talk in the pine woods. She had been at Hampton three days, and now she was quite alone, except for the slight acquaintances she had made since her arrival.

Mrs. Mavis's nice little programme had all been broken up the day before by a telegram announcing that her sister-in-law was seriously ill, and desired her presence immediately.

Mother and son had set off a few hours later, leaving Lenox behind at the beach. It would have been cruel to drag the girl into a strange house, darkened by illness. She had pleaded to be left behind. Loneliness, she insisted, could have no terrors for her with that great blue ocean to keep her company.

They had chosen, for greater freedom, a private boarding-house close by the sea. Lenox would be left in kindly hands for the few days of her friends' absence. Ben was to return for her as soon as his aunt's improved health would make the girl's visit agreeable.

Lenox could hardly understand the reluctance with which her friends left her to herself for this brief interval. "If I were a baby, instead of seventeen, you could not have a more hopeless opinion of my incapacity!" she said, with her gayest laugh. "Do you suppose anybody is going to try to run away with me?"

Before the three met again something had happened which made that light question of Lenox seem prophetic.

The girl had been sitting on the rocks more than an hour, absorbed in the scene before her. Behind her the gray beach stretched for miles. Before her lay the blue, tumbling sea. The wind blew the girl's hair about her face, as she sat there in her white dress and shade hat, motionless as a statue, her shawl of scarlet wool gathered about her shoulders, the bright color showing finely against the dark background of the rocks. She made a picture there, just on the edge of the sea, of which she little dreamed. It struck a young man who had been out for an hour's row, and who was bringing his small boat in shore with the lusty strokes of a trained oarsman. Lenox never glanced at him. She had eyes for nothing but that great world of the sea, which stretched before her until its leaping, flashing blue was lost in that other still, solemn blue of the far horizon. The tide was coming in with its cool, salt winds, with the glitter of its snowy surf, with the thunder of triumph with which the great waves hurled themselves in passionate caresses upon the land. Lenox drank it all in. She, too, "seemed a part" of that infinite joy

and life and motion. She watched the white gleam of the sea-birds' wings, the pretty sail-boats as they darted about, the stately barks and schooners as they rose and vanished in the mystery and beauty of the distant horizon. Meanwhile the tide was steadily creeping up the granite knees of the rocks, draped with sea-weed, where Lenox was sitting. At high tide only a few points would stand above the water.

"Does she see how the tide is getting behind her? Has the creature a notion to drown herself?" thought the young oarsman, as he brought his boat on the sands, and sprang lightly ashore.

At the same moment the dashing of some spray in Lenox's face aroused her. She was on her feet in a moment. She saw at a glance that she was being rapidly cut off from the shore. The girl certainly was in no peril. The point where she stood would not be submerged in so calm a day; but it would not be pleasant to wait, cut off from the shore, on that solitary headland, for the tide to go out.

Lenox Dare once awakened to an emergency usually proved equal to it. She came down the rocks now, light and swift as bounding chamois. The oddness of her position, and its touch of adventure, strongly excited her. But she suddenly stood still, while a perplexed look came over her face. The water had wound itself in among the rocks, and rolled a wide stream between her and the next point to which she must pass on her descent. There was no time to be lost. Lenox had just made up her mind to leap the chasm when a voice at her right, and just below her, called out: "Take care, Miss! You will

make that leap at your peril. Allow me to assist you."

Lenox turned, and saw the speaker. He had just come around a sharp angle of the rocks which he had climbed from the opposite side. He was a rather tall, ruddy-skinned, yellowish-haired and whiskered young fellow, about twenty-two. He was well, but not foppishly, dressed in a light travelling suit, and he had altogether a pleasant, gentlemanly air, as he stood there, lifting his hat to the girl while he spoke.

The stranger's address had been perfectly respectful. Any young girl in Lenox's plight would have accepted his proffered service. She gave him her hands in the frankest, simplest fashion. "Thank you," she said, with a merry laugh. "I little suspected the ocean was stealing such a march on me while I sat up there watching those grand old waves!"

As Lenox said this she sprang lightly across the stream. There were steep, slippery places still between her and the sand. Lenox would have made nothing of them, still she could hardly decline the young man's aid.

"You must have enjoyed the sight immensely," he remarked.

"Nobody could help doing that," answered Lenox, and she flashed up one of her vivid glances into the stranger's face, and he said to himself: "By Jove! What magnificent eyes the creature has!"

"I saw you sitting on the rocks when I was out in my sail-boat," he continued. "I was half-inclined

to think you were some ocean nymph, come up from the depths to sun yourself and watch the sea awhile before you darted back again into your native waves."

Again Lenox's laugh rang out gaily. "Did I make you think of that?" she asked. "It is curious how the sea brings up all sorts of lovely old myths and legends that one has not thought of for years. While I was sitting there I half-expected to see some huge Triton riding on the back of a green wave, or the sea-horses rising up with their manes glittering like the spray. How real the sight of the sea makes all those delightful old stories!"

Again the young man looked at Lenox with curious, amused eyes. The sea air had stung her cheeks into a vivid glow. The gladness of the hour was in her face.

Mrs. Mavis had often been puzzled to decide in her own mind whether Lenox was pretty, or even good-looking. Her eyes were something wonderful, but when it came to the rest of the face, the little woman was in doubt. It lacked the soft bloom of the dead Janet's, the pretty pink and white of the young girls at Briarswild. It had been dark and thin when she came to them, although the lines had been growing softer and finer each year. Mrs. Mavis, however, could not perceive — what perhaps an artist might have done — that whatever beauty Lenox might have it would develop slowly, after a law of its own; and that the young girl's face must wait for its soul, for its womanhood. The spring has its own time — its perfect blossoming. So also has the summer.

The question which had puzzled Mrs. Mavis a good

many times puzzled the young man in his turn. Amid his other conceits, he plumed himself on being a good judge of young girls, but he was at a loss how to classify the one whom he had helped over the rocks that morning. For they had reached the sands by this time. He had now only to lift his hat and take leave of his companion, but he felt more than half inclined to pursue the acquaintance begun so informally.

Lenox turned toward her boarding-house, half a mile up the beach. She was about to say good-morning to her companion.

"I am just going up to the hotel," he said. "As our paths seem to lie in the same direction I will walk with you, if you have no objection."

"Oh, certainly, I have no objection," answered Lenox, with perfect transparency of speech and tone.

The walk over the beach was very fascinating to the young girl. Familiarity had not yet blunted the fine edge of her delight and wonder at the new world around her. Every step of the way held some fresh marvel. Her outspoken pleasure, her perfect naturalness, her bright, quaint way of expressing herself, amused the stranger, and piqued his curiosity.

"This all seems to be quite new to you," he said, as they walked along, in answer to some remark of Lenox.

"This is my first visit to the ocean," she replied. "It seems the more wonderful to be left here all alone with it."

"All alone?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Lenox. "Of

course you do not understand, and I believe I was speaking half to myself." Then, in a few words, she related how her friends had been suddenly summoned away, and how very odd it seemed to find herself all alone in the quaint old town on the edge of the sea.

"You must find it very lonely, I imagine?"

"Lonely!" repeated Lenox, with her happy, incredulous laugh. "That is what Mrs. Mavis and Ben were all the time insisting on. But how could one be lonely in such a place!"

This was a part of the talk as the young people walked slowly up the sands at Hampton Beach, in the summer morning. Other talk was suggested by the time and place; and still Lenox, fresh and quaint, puzzled and attracted the stranger who walked by her side.

At last the gate of the square, two-storied, white house where she was staying came in sight.

Then the stranger said, in his half-careless, half-gallant way, a way which young ladies, as a rule, thought very fascinating: "As you have allowed me to walk up with you, I shall take the liberty to present myself," and he offered his card.

Lenox received it cordially enough, but with a little glance of surprise. She read the name, written in a large, clear hand, with a good many flourishes, "GUY FOSDICK."

"Now, may I be bold enough to ask your name, also?" said the young man, as Lenox looked up from the card.

"My name," said the girl, with her great eyes gazing quietly at him, "is Lenox Dare."

"I should expect the creature would have an odd name!" thought young Fosdick, but he said in his subtly flattering, yet wholly respectful manner: "I like this introduction vastly better than a more formal one. As you are quite alone, and in a strange world, and I happen to be stopping at Boar's Head for a few days, can I not be of some service to you?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Fosdick," answered the girl. "But really I can think of nothing which — which you can do for me."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Miss Dare," answered the young man. The girl's indifference to his attempts at farther acquaintance had the last effect she intended, and only piqued him into making farther advances.

He spoke of croquet; he described the fascinating sport on the beach; he told her that a party of young people was coming down that very afternoon to have a game. He asked if Miss Dare would join them if he called for her.

She thanked him in her bright, frank way, as far from any thought of fascinating him as though the accomplished young cavalier by her side had been her own grandfather, but she said there were so many other things to see and do that she found no time for croquet; and though she sometimes played she had no special skill at the game.

He made another trial. Would she allow him, he asked, the privilege of a properly introduced acquaintance, to call on her?

"Certainly," she answered. "But if he gave himself the trouble it was quite doubtful whether he

would find her at home. She was out-doors most of the time in this enchanting weather, and this wonderful scenery."

Guy Fosdick knew the ways of girls. Was this one, after all, only trying to play her *role* in a little more artful fashion than the others? But a glance at Lenox's face answered that question. There was nothing for him to do but lift his hat and bid her good-morning. Guy Fosdick went up to his hotel conscious that he had absolutely failed to make the impression he intended. It was a new experience to him.

Unlike as were the two women who had the shaping of Lenox Dare's childhood and youth, their influence had, in one respect, been identical. There was a side of the world of which Lenox was as ignorant as a baby. Mrs. Crane had a narrow-minded notion that the less a young girl knew about the world the better and safer it was for her. Mrs. Mavis had found Lenox's simplicity so attractive that the woman could never make up her mind to disturb it. Such ignorance always has its perils. No harm, however, was likely to overtake Lenox so long as she remained sheltered and love-guarded under the roof at Briarswild.

But Mrs. Mavis very naturally did not reflect that Lenox's life, like all others, was liable to sudden changes. Some event might happen which would launch the young, inexperienced girl into the great world, among men and women where her lack of knowledge might lead her into great mistakes, into terrible dangers.

Guy Fosdick, who had run up to Boar's Head with some young friends for a few days boating and fishing, was a man of the world; a very young one, it is true, and therein lay his best hope, for he was barely twenty-three. He had graduated at Harvard, with moderate honors, the year before. He had not yet settled himself to any work in life. There was no need that he should be in a hurry about choosing his profession, he reasoned. A young fellow with a comfortable fortune in prospect might as well have a jolly time and see something of the world before he went into harness for life.

Young Fosdick's father was a rich man, a Beacon street autocrat. Guy was the only son among half a dozen sisters. He had been a good deal spoiled from his boyhood. He had plenty of personal conceits and vanities, besides the family one of pluming himself on his old name and high position.

In his family Guy had always been regarded as a prodigy. His parents, his handsome, dashing sisters scolded, and petted, and idolized him. His classmates regarded him as a good fellow, bright and jolly, while he was an immense favorite with all young ladies. He had the gift of bright surface talk, the tact and grace of manner which make the model carpet-knight. It was his secret conviction that no young woman on whom he chose to exert his fascinations would be able to resist them. He meant to be a gentleman; he would have been extremely mortified had any one regarded him otherwise, yet his standards were no more elevated than the world in which he moved. His life had been thus far what he

regarded as open and honorable, although he had of late "sowed some wild oats," and been drawn into some associations which he would not for worlds have mentioned at home.

Had Fate, one might wonder, in some mood of utmost irony brought these two together in that old town by the sea — the man of the world, with his fine manners, and his drawing-room gallantries, and this girl, with her young enthusiasms, her ignorance of life, and her unquestioning faith in all that wore a fair and courteous guise!

Young Fosdick was quite right in his opinion. Lenox hardly gave him a thought after he was out of sight. His manners seemed to her very graceful, but her first impressions — those which are oftenest keenest and most trustworthy — were not altogether favorable. She did not reason about it, but she felt, rather than perceived, something lacking under all the polish and gallantry. Those were very elegant manners, no doubt, she thought. But, after all, she liked Ben Mavis's frank, simple ways a good deal better.

The next day, at low tide, Lenox went down all alone on the beach to hunt for shells and sea-weed, and other treasures of the deep, which the waves in their swift retreat had forgotten to take with them. The light, lithe figure moving about amid the rocks and stones could be seen at a long distance on that wide, open coast; but Lenox no more dreamed of any one's watching her than the waves far out on the beach, singing to each other their secret of eternal joy, thought who might be listening.

A step near at hand made her look up suddenly from under the deep rim of her sun-hat. There stood Guy Fosdick only a few feet from her. He lifted his cap, and approached at once. "This is a most lucky accident for me, Miss Dare," he said, very gallantly. "How long have you been here?" and he gave her his hand.

There was nothing for Lenox to do but give hers in turn. It was a little, ungloved hand, the soft fingers wet and rather soiled by contact with sand and rock. The truth was, Guy Fosdick's appearance on the scene was anything but agreeable to her. Lenox had her moods of liking to be alone. Rocks and sands and distant sea whose murmurs stole softly to the shore were all-sufficing now. Elegant manners and gallant speeches were, no doubt, very fine things, but they seemed to jar on that time and place.

Lenox had not been trained to disguise her emotions. Young Fosdick detected her real feeling in her first half-dismayed glance. "She's anything but glad to see me!" he said to himself.

"I have no idea how long I have been here," replied the girl gravely, as she stood before him, with her basket in one hand. "It must be a good while, I think. I came down to hunt for — all kinds of sea things."

"And I wandered down here for no reason in the world that I could give to myself. How could I have any suspicion that the sea-nymph of the rocks was flitting round the sands at low tide?"

"I suppose people who come to the beach can hardly help occasionally stumbling upon each other,"

answered Lenox, with the quaint, old-fashioned air that came of her lonely childhood.

Young Fosdick had a keen sense of humor. "That tone and look would not have misbecome my venerable grandmother," he said to himself. "But what a hopeless simpleton it must be! She actually believes our meeting here is a pure accident!"

He could not imagine another girl existed who would not have perceived at once that he had contrived to bring about this interview. But he kept up his *role* admirably. The fact that Lenox wished him away made him only more bent on remaining. He did his best to be useful and agreeable. It was not strange that he succeeded. He joined in Lenox's search, and soon became interested himself in the hunt for shells and sea-plants. He could give Lenox here precisely the sort of help she needed. In this eager search, in this wide, out-door life, the acquaintance grew naturally and easily. Young Fosdick had no idea of spending an hour in a young lady's society without attempting to carry on a flirtation; but significant looks and subtle flatteries glanced away from Lenox like arrows from charmed armor. She either could not or would not understand, he thought. But the more he talked with her the more interested he grew. It was not easy work to clamber around the wet boulders and among the tangled, slippery weed, and Lenox, light and agile as she was, met with a good many small mishaps, and the merriment that followed only gave new zest to the toil and the pleasure, and brought the two into closer acquaintance.

In a little while Lenox's first shyness with strangers

wore off, and she was as much at her ease with young Fosdick as she would have been with Ben Mavis or one of her schoolmates. She even, without dreaming of it, put Guy Fosdick on his mettle. If she surprised and amused him one moment by her simplicity, she startled him the next by her swift intelligence, by a knowledge of books, which, at her age, seemed incredible.

When, late in the afternoon, the tide turned, Lenox's basket was filled with all sorts of rare specimens of moss and shells, beach-weed and fungi, which one finds at low tide among the rocks and sands. By this time the young people were on a most friendly footing. Slightly wearied by their exercise they climbed up the rocks and sat down in a little arbor built just above the highest tide-mark.

Lenox's eyes fairly gloated over the basket of treasures which young Fosdick set down at her feet. "You have been very kind; I owe the best part of them to you," she said simply and gratefully.

"You are not sorry, then, Miss Dare, that we met accidentally this afternoon?" inquired Guy; and then he thought what a perfectly arranged accident it was, when he had been watching her at least half an hour from the bluffs at Boar's Head!

"Sorry!" repeated Lenox. Then she added in her frank, cordial fashion, "I am heartily glad you came when you did, Mr. Fosdick."

"But you were not that at first. I saw with a glance that I was *de trop*, Miss Dare."

He said this half for the purpose of testing her. He was curious to see how far this girl's limpid truth-

fulness would carry her. Would she have the courage to own to his face that she had been sorry to see him?

The red which the salt breeze had stung in Lenox's cheeks deepened a shade.

"I beg you will excuse me, Mr. Fosdick," she said. "I did not mean to be rude."

"You were not in the least, Miss Dare. It was not your fault, certainly, if you were not glad to see me."

"But I was," answered Lenox, looking at him with bright, unflinching eyes, "*in a little while.*"

"That bit of feminine frankness was heroic!" thought the young man. "What a puzzling little specimen it is — refreshing, too, after a fellow has been pretty thoroughly bored with the other sort!"

They walked home in the sunset; they heard the song of the returning tide; they watched the clouds in the west, the bars of crimson, the soft lilacs with primrose edges.

"Oh, I wish I had Dainty here!" suddenly cried Lenox, turning to her companion with eyes that radiated light. "How we would scamper over those sands and down into that surf!"

"Who is Dainty?" asked the young man, with a good deal of interest.

"Oh, I forgot! Of course you do not know!" she exclaimed, and then she went on to describe, as nobody else could, the handsome little thoroughbred, fleet as the wind, yet docile to her voice and hand as a pet fawn.

"No doubt you and Dainty would enjoy the scene vastly; but what would become of *me*?"

Guy contrived to get some very subtle meanings into his glance and tone as he asked this question.

"But the sea and the shore would still be left you!" answered Lenox, in a tone whose gay coolness the most finished coquette could not have rivaled.

"She would actually prefer her horse this moment to my society!" thought Guy Fosdick, and afterward he redoubled his efforts to be agreeable.

When the two parted at the gate he had won a promise from Lenox that she would allow him to call the next morning and accompany her in her walk on the beach.

That very night sad tidings came from the Berkshire Hills. Ben Mavis's aunt had grown worse, and neither he nor his mother could leave the invalid for the present.

The Fates seem to conspire to throw Lenox into young Fosdick's society at this juncture. A breezy, merry walk on the beach and among the rocks consumed the forenoon. Lenox's companion was familiar with the coast, and prided himself on being a good oarsman. He waxed eloquent over the fascinations of rocking out on the great waves in a sail-boat. Lenox was eager to enjoy the novel sensation for herself, and when Guy proposed to take her out for a little sail the next day, she at once accepted his offer.

For the first time Lenox Dare found herself gliding over blue, tumbling waves, in a fairy craft. The delicious motion, the mystery of the glancing, heaving world below fairly intoxicated her. She sat still most of the time, watching the waves or gazing like one lost in a dream on young Fosdick, who man-

aged the small craft admirably. They were out for a couple of hours. As the young man brought his boat in shore, Lenox, her cheeks stung by the sea-air into the reddest bloom, looked at him with happy, grateful eyes, and said she should never forget that he had given her her first sail on the sea.

In days that followed, the young people saw more and more of each other. They had walks on the shingle and rambles in the woods. In the absence of her friends, Guy took on himself, naturally and gracefully, the office of Lenox's escort around the coast. He was familiar with it for miles, and in his company she visited many an interesting and picturesque point to which she could never have gone by herself.

Guy repeated wonderful old legends and ballads which haunt the shores. He related some of the household traditions which the farmers and fishermen talk over in winter nights when the wild storms thunder around Hampton Beach. In a thousand ways he made that waiting by the sea something delightful and vivid to Lenox Dare — something which it could never have been without him.

The charm of her fresh, guileless nature gained a stronger hold upon him every day. He had never been so simple and manly in his life. He forgot, sometimes for hours together, in this girl's bright, frank companionship, in her quaintness, her playfulness, her cleverness, the flirtations and the flatteries that had thus far been Guy Fosdick's principal *role* with young women.

And Lenox Dare, in a very passion of delight with the new world around her, talked and jested, was

grave or gay with this elegant young man of the world, with no more thought of feminine arts and airs — no more notion of his falling in love with her than with the birds that were singing out the June in the green Hampton woods.

And Guy Fosdick knew that perfectly ; and sometimes it nettled him.

CHAPTER X.

GUY FOSDICK AND HIS FRIEND.

GUY FOSDICK, in his growing intimacy with Lenox Dare, could not fail to learn something of her history. Her home at Briarswild — the life she led there — the people most closely associated with it — came up frequently in her talk. Guy showed an interest — this time not assumed — in all that concerned her. There was something about these people who had adopted the orphan grand-niece of old Colonel Marvell, and of whom she was so fond, that puzzled him. They seemed as much out of the line of his ordinary experiences as Lenox herself. They lived on a farm, in a little out-of-the-way country town. They could be nothing more than simple, good-natured folk, the fastidious youth frequently told himself; but in his own mind he was not more than half satisfied with the social status which he rather contemptuously awarded the Mavis household. There was one person, too, about whom he felt a curiosity which he would have scorned to own, even to himself. Ben Mavis's name came up as frequently and naturally in Lenox's talk as his mother's did. Ben indeed was so much a part of her home-life that it was impossible to know her long without

hearing about him. When he first caught the name, Guy manifested a curiosity which his companion was not slow to gratify.

“Who is Ben Mavis?” she said, repeating Guy’s inquiry. “He is the noblest, kindest-hearted fellow in the whole world, Mr. Fosdick. How I wish you could know him!”

“He must be a lucky fellow — whoever he is — to stand so high in your good graces, Miss Dare,” answered the young man. “I might not, however, be able to share your enthusiasm for him.”

“Oh, you couldn’t help doing so when you came to know him,” exclaimed Lenox decidedly; and she went on to describe Ben in a way that, had he overheard her, would have made that manly youth blush like a girl. She related all sorts of stories of their life together under the happy home-roof, and in the wide out-doors of Briarswild.

Guy was not long in making up his mind that Ben Mavis was in love with Lenox Dare. That conviction did not enhance his friendly feeling toward the young man.

As for Lenox, she puzzled Guy here as she did in most things. He could not make up his mind as to the nature of her regard for young Mavis. “Could it be so frank, so outspoken, if it were really that of a young girl for her lover?” Guy asked himself this question a good many times every day, and was never able to answer it satisfactorily to his own mind. His interest in her friend pleased Lenox, who little suspected what was at the bottom of it. She was always ready to talk about Ben, and young Fosdick

was always ready to listen, though he sometimes felt a strong inclination to break out and curse the fellow. Could it be that this elegant youth, this Harvard graduate, this squire of drawing-rooms was jealous of "Corydon, that moon-struck swain, that backwoods bumpkin!" as he contemptuously styled Ben Mavis in his thoughts.

"I see the young fellow is a sort of hero in your eyes. If I took him at your word, Miss Dare, I should have to imagine some combination of Apollo and Nestor."

There was the faintest touch of irony in Guy's light tones as he made this speech. Lenox only half discerned that, but it was enough to put her on her mettle. She turned to him now — the girlish head bridling, the dark eyes flashing.

"When you speak of Ben Mavis to me, Mr. Fosdick," she said, "will you please to do it in — in a little different tone?"

Guy hastened to make his peace. "I beg your pardon, Miss Dare," he said. "I did not suppose my foolish jest could annoy you. You can forgive me, I am sure, for being slightly envious of this lucky young friend of yours."

"Envious!" repeated Lenox, with a puzzled look.

"Of course I am!" replied Guy, with a glance and tone that would have raised many a young girl to a seventh heaven. "Your liking for this precious fellow makes you put all the rest of his sex so immensely into the background."

The look and tone were lost on Lenox. But she answered the words gravely, half-apologetically.

"But you see, Mr. Fosdick, nobody could be to me what Ben Mavis is. If he were my brother, I could not love him better."

"But the fact remains that he is not your brother, Miss Dare; not your remotest connection, even, and yet you look at me coolly and insist that you love him!"

"Better than anybody in the world," answered Lenox, fervently, "unless, it may be, his mother!"

"May you always add that last clause, Miss Dare! I am not sure, however, that young Mavis would subscribe to my wish."

Lenox looked puzzled for a moment, then, as his meaning broke on her, she burst into the gayest laugh. "Did young Fosdick really suppose Ben Mavis was in love with her? Could anything more absurd be imagined?"

Greatly as the idea amused her, yet she felt as though it were a sort of reflection on Ben, and for his sake, half resented it.

"Oh, Mr. Fosdick, you were never more mistaken in your life. Ben Mavis is entirely above any absurdity of that sort. He is only the truest friend, the dearest brother a girl could ever have!"

Nobody could doubt the absolute sincerity of this remark. Its total lack of vanity struck Guy dumb for a moment. Here was a young girl who actually resented the idea of a lover! He had not supposed such a phenomenon possible. This talk occurred as the two sat on the shingle the very day that Guy Fosdick took Lenox out on her first sail.

It was the keynote to many a subsequent talk.

Guy had his own motives for frequently alluding to Ben Mavis; and Lenox was always sufficiently ready to respond to this subject. Young Fosdick was perfectly aware that she would any moment have gladly relinquished his society for that of the absent youth. The thought was not flattering to his self-love.

“Am I actually fallen so low as to dread a rival in that knight of the ploughshare!” he asked himself half seriously, half comically, remembering his fascinations for most of Lenox’s sex. Yet whenever he hinted of the existence of any sentimental feeling between the two Lenox always treated the matter with a half-incredulous, half-amused scorn, which he saw was not assumed to conceal any deeper emotion. But her indifference to certain looks and tones and speeches of his own was not less transparent.

Lenox Dare, however, little as she suspected it, was at this time on perilous ground. Her nature was, as we have seen, one that ripened slowly out of the innocence and unconsciousness of childhood; but as she said of herself, she was “deep in seventeen,” and she was thrown daily into the society of a man of the world who was doing his best to fascinate her. Nobody who saw her bright, cordial greeting of the young man could doubt that his companionship was becoming, day by day, more agreeable to her. What girl could long withstand those graceful attentions, those subtle flatteries! The romance of young maidenhood might any moment be awakened in the soul of Lenox Dare. She would never flirt with Guy Fosdick, as plenty of young girls were in the habit of doing, but there was nothing to hinder her falling in love with him.

At the end of three weeks, during which they had spent a large share of every day in each other's society, Guy Fosdick invited Lenox to drive with him to Rye Beach. She accepted the invitation with a pleasure sincere and outspoken as a child's; but her heart and fancy were still as untouched by the elegant stranger as they were that morning when she first met him on the rocks.

It was early in the forenoon when Guy's light buggy drew up at the gate of the square white house. Lenox must have caught sight of him from the window, for she was at the gate by the time he had alighted.

"I was too impatient to keep you waiting a moment, Mr. Fosdick," she said, and he thought she had never looked quite so tantalizingly picturesque as she did at that moment. She wore, for the first time, the new suit which Mrs. Mavis had finished for her the day before she left home. The light and dark grays of the costume made a pretty contrast, and were surmounted by a little gray hat, with a cluster of small foam-like plumes tipped with gold.

And in all the world there was no gladder heart that morning than the young girl's who sat by Guy Fosdick's side, and rolled away from the voices of the sea into the green old highways.

And the gladness was in her shining eyes, in her glancing smile, in her sparkling talk. It made her a bright electric presence that morning. It half-turned the head — it was a pretty cool one, too, considering his years — of her companion.

Ignorant as Lenox Dare was of men and of the

world, she was no simpleton. She was quite aware that young Fosdick pressed her hands at meeting and parting; that he bestowed on her glances intended to convey mysterious and unutterable meanings, and accompanied the glances with tender, significant tones. She had settled in her own mind, however, that these things meant only ordinary courtesies; they were probably the habits of the society in which he moved. This theory had enabled Lenox to meet all the young man's advances with a cool unconsciousness which protected her better than the subtlest arts of the most finished coquette.

I suppose no man can be brought within the powerful attraction of a pure and guileless nature without being himself elevated by that contact. The best side of Guy Fosdick had certainly come to the surface in his acquaintance with Lenox Dare. In her presence he often forgot to be anything but simple and honest and manly. She drew him—at least while he was with her—to higher levels of thought and feeling. But this effect could hardly be more than a transient one. When counteracting influences were once more at work the traditions and standards of a lifetime would regain their ascendancy.

“What a lovely old road this is!” exclaimed Lenox, drawing a deep breath of delight, and gazing about her with eyes that lost nothing—not even the soft trembling of shadows thrown by mighty oaks and graceful elms, not even the flashing of the brown squirrels along the old stone walls.

“I thought you would enjoy it, Miss Dare,” answered Guy, “but I chose the road for another reason than its picturesqueness.”

“What was that, Mr. Fosdick?” she asked, curiously.

“It is an ancient turnpike full of historic associations and legends. It is the very road over which Lafayette traveled when he went from Boston to Portsmouth on his last visit to America.”

He watched Lenox as he said this. He saw her gaze go out with a new interest and delight over the wide summer landscape. The quiet old highway that every little while lost itself among the cool, dusky shadows of the woods, the ancient farm-houses asleep among old orchards and blossoming wheat-fields were touched suddenly with a new poetic charm and association to the girl. The road that led to Rye Beach, the old Portsmouth turnpike, was hallowed ground to her now. Her imagination could invest it with romance, and people it with historic images.

She turned to Guy Fosdick. She smiled gratefully on him. “What a delightful surprise you have given me,” she said. “I hardly know how to thank you for it.”

When she said that, young Fosdick brought his face so near to hers that her young, fragrant breath mingled with his own.

“If you will only say you have some regard — some liking for me, Miss Dare, I shall be thanked a thousand times,” he answered, and his voice was low and tender, and for that moment he was more in earnest than he had ever been in his life, saying this sort of thing.

“But I do like you extremely,” said Lenox, looking

at him with calm, rather surprised eyes. "I thought you must know that."

"If I did, such a sort of liking would not precisely satisfy me," he answered.

"What sort of liking do you mean, Mr. Fosdick?" asked Lenox. Her arrow had hit the mark this time, but a glance at her calm eyes, at her cheeks that had not deepened a tint, showed him how unconsciously it had been aimed.

Guy Fosdick had, in his relations with women, his own code of honor. Elastic as that was, it would not permit him to offer himself to a woman whom he had no intention of marrying.

"I should be satisfied to hear you say you liked me a little better than anybody else in the world," he answered; and then he thought to himself, "A fellow might find that speech unpleasantly near a *bona fide* proposal, if she were disposed to take advantage of it."

"But that could not be true," answered Lenox, gravely, "because of Mrs. Mavis and Ben."

"Oh, hang Ben Mavis!"

When he said that, Lenox's laugh rang out merrily. Guy's simulated jealousy, as she had come to regard it, of young Mavis, always struck her as immensely comical. How its absurdity would amuse Ben, she thought.

Guy shook his head with a solemn gravity over the girl's gay laugh.

"I suppose I must make up my mind to come after that redoubtable youth and his mother; but it is rather hard, Miss Dare, on a fellow who cannot understand your fatuity over those people."

“But you will not call it fatuity when you come to see them, Mr. Fosdick,” answered Lenox, very decidedly, “as I hope you will some day at Briarswild.”

“Thank you. If I ever come to Briarswild, and I feel very much tempted now to vow that I shall, it will be to see somebody beside Ben Mavis or his mother.”

Of course his meaning was unmistakable. Lenox was pleased — flattered more or less ; still this speech, like many another of its kind, was doomed to fall wide of the mark.

In a few moments her gaze had gone out again into the summer world around her. She sat very still now ; there was the softest stirring of color in her cheeks, the dream of a smile about her lips. Young Fosdick marked the delicate line of the profile in the shade of the gray hat.

What was she thinking about ? he wondered. Were those last words of his, with the tone to which he had keyed them, echoing in her memory ? If he could only get a glimpse of the eyes that were shining under those long brown lashes !

He drove on for awhile in silence through the picturesque windings of the old road, through the hot sunshine that blazed between the fields, through the shadows that hung dim and cool among the woods. The air was alive with all the soft, dreamy sounds of midsummer, with faint winds, with the rustling of leaves, with the humming of insects in the tall grass. Lenox heard these no longer — no longer saw the brown squirrels darting along the old stone walls.

At last Guy broke the silence. He leaned forward so that once more the maiden's sweet breath floated about him.

"Your thoughts, Miss Dare," he said, "seem such happy ones, that I wish I might share in them!"

She turned on him eyes that made him think of a summer sunrise.

"You have, Mr. Fosdick," she said, most cordially. "At least, I owe the thoughts to your kindness."

"My dear Miss Dare I am doubtless very stupid, but I cannot read your riddle."

"It was not what you said about the old road," answered Lenox, "that set me to thinking of Lafayette. He was always one of my heroes. I was trying to imagine what he must have felt, what memories must have crowded upon him as he drove over this very ground!"

"And did you succeed?" inquired Guy, with a gravity that was a little suspicious.

"Partly. I fancied him recalling that old, gay, splendid life at the French court, and all which he left behind him when, hardly more than a boy, he crossed the seas to join in our own long fight for freedom. How the hardships and miseries of that time must have come back to him! He must have remembered, too, that dull, good-hearted Louis, and poor Marie Antoinette, and the grand, terrible days when they looked to him to save their crown and throne. He must have thought how it all ended for him in the bitter flight, in the shameful capture on the frontier, in the dreary Austrian dungeons. What a life that man had! What sufferings and what glo-

ries! I can just fancy him going over it all as he sat looking out on the pleasant road, on some of these very old farm-houses. For it was not so very long ago—at least not quite half a century. My uncle, Colonel Marvell, met Lafayette in Paris, and dined with him several times while he was in America. He used to tell me about it when I sat on his knee before the big fireplace in his own room, while the great brass andirons shone in the blaze, and the odd little figures in the blue Dutch tiles around the chimney would dance in the firelight. It seems as though that all happened yesterday.”

Guy Fosdick had hoped for a very different sort of answer when he attempted to penetrate Lenox's thoughts. The ludicrous side of the whole thing struck him now.

“It was bad enough,” he told himself, “to fear a rival in Corydon, moon-faced and rustic-mannered; but when it came to an octogenarian—one too, who had been in his grave nearly half a century—” He did not finish the thought; he had a keen sense of the ludicrous; he burst into a hearty laugh.

He checked himself in a moment, and asked, earnestly: “Miss Dare, may I tell you precisely what I think of you?”

“I shall be very glad to know,” answered Lenox, partly amused and partly curious.

“You are the quaintest, brightest, most artless, most inexplicable, most tantalizing specimen of feminine humanity that ever bewitched a fellow's brain!”

The merriest laughs wavered in the air about

him. "Do I seem to you all those high-flown superlatives, Mr. Fosdick?" cried Lenox, with a little toss of her head that was more coquettish than anything he had yet seen in her.

This was a specimen of the talk of the young people as they drove over from Hampton to Rye Beach that morning. There was a great deal that was novel and full of interest to Lenox in the great summer-hotels, in the picturesque cottages, and in all the summer-life along the shore. Even Guy, to whom it had grown commonplace through long familiarity, saw the whole scene now with fresh eyes. They made a wide detour on their return, late in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, young Fosdick had been entertaining his companion with a description of Cambridge, and some gossip sketches of the undergraduate life at Harvard—a life doubly interesting to Lenox, because of her uncle and her father, both of whom, she knew, had graduated there.

"We were to visit Cambridge this summer," she said. "That was a part of our programme before we left home; but this long illness of Ben's aunt will, I fear, disarrange all our plans. I shall be greatly disappointed if we miss Cambridge; though, of course, it can't be helped."

An idea suddenly struck Guy. "Why should you miss it, Miss Dare?" he exclaimed.

Then he proposed to escort her to the old town; he waxed eloquent over all its objects of interest, its ancient halls, its library, its museum, its beautiful, quiet old streets, its lovely walks, its embowering

elms. He begged that he might be allowed to introduce her to "the groves of his Academe." He was quite sure that he, familiar with every inch of the ground, could make her visit vastly more interesting than one who was totally unfamiliar with the place. The car-ride to Boston required but two hours. Would not Miss Dare give him the pleasure of being her escort?

As he asked that question, Lenox drew a long breath. A little shadow of indecision wavered over her face. Had she known more of the world she would certainly have questioned the propriety of taking this journey with a stranger. But she could hardly regard Guy Fosdick in that light, after these weeks of intimate acquaintance. The pictures he had drawn had inspired her with an ardent desire to see her father's Alma Mater. She saw, too, that in this visit young Fosdick would have immense advantages over Ben Mavis, who was a total stranger to the ground. She did wish Mrs. Mavis were at hand at this juncture; but she felt sure that indulgent matron would make but one reply. Indeed, she fancied that both Ben and his mother would regret her failing to accept the piece of good fortune that had come in her way.

So Lenox's girlish brain reasoned—not wisely, but naturally enough under the circumstances.

As for Guy Fosdick, he had, at this time, no motive to conceal. A visit to Harvard in Lenox's society had strong attractions for him. When he saw she hesitated, he exerted himself to overcome her scruples, and by the time they reached Hampton he had

succeeded. Lenox had agreed to visit Cambridge with him in the course of two or three days.

The afternoon train from Boston had just dropped its passengers at the station as they drove up. Suddenly Guy Fosdick exclaimed, in a tone of surprise, and not altogether of pleasure, "By Jove! there's Kendall!"

Lenox's eyes followed his glance. She saw a rather heavily-built, dark-skinned, black-haired and black-whiskered young man standing in the door of the little station. He wore a summer travelling-suit, and carried a large travelling-bag. In a moment he caught sight of Guy, and, lifting his hat, came eagerly toward the carriage.

"Ah, my dear fellow," he began, in a light, jovial sort of tone, "I've hunted you down at last. What on earth has kept you burrowing here so long?"

As he asked this question, he looked at Guy's companion. Something gleamed a moment in his watchful black eyes, and was gone before one could read its meaning.

"I like the sea and a sail-boat better than anything Boston has to offer at this season," answered Guy. "Are you jolly down there, Kendall?"

"Not very, Fosdick. Narrow streets and steaming brick walls and mercury deep in the nineties don't incline a fellow to be lively. So I've followed your example, and run up to join you for a day or two at Boar's Head."

There was some more of this talk. It was all in the light, good-fellow sort of vein which Kendall affected with his cronies. He was quite popular with

them, especially with men younger than himself, for he was now past thirty. Lenox sat still, listening to it all with a little, amused smile.

It might have struck a keen observer that young Fosdick was in no hurry to present his friend to Lenox; but Kendall kept on in his light vein, until Guy found the introduction could not be avoided.

Austin Kendall lifted his hat with his best grace; but when Lenox Dare laid her pure young palm in that man's hand her good angel must have shuddered!

When, a few minutes later, the young people were driving into the village, Lenox turned suddenly to Guy, and asked gravely: "Is your friend a good man, Mr. Fosdick?"

Guy looked a little startled. "Kendall is not a saint, certainly — perhaps not a good man, tried by your very exalted standards, Miss Dare; but he is a jolly, companionable, good-hearted fellow. What can have put it into your head to ask that question, I wonder!" he ended, with a little abruptness, hardly like his usual courtesy.

"I really cannot tell," answered Lenox, half to herself.

She was not aware that the question had its origin in the flash of repulsion which went over her as she shook hands with Austin Kendall. The feeling had come and gone so swiftly she had hardly been conscious of it.

Before Guy could reply, they drew up at the front gate.

"I have had one of the happiest days of my life," said Lenox, as Guy gave her his hand, and she sprang lightly to the ground.

"I shall not be satisfied, Miss Dare, if you do not say more than that to me of next Thursday," answered Guy, gallantly, alluding to their contemplated visit to Cambridge.

On his way to Boar's Head, Guy overtook his friend, and made room for him in the buggy, and the two had a drive in the late afternoon. They seemed a jovial pair of cronies. Young men were usually in a jolly mood in Kendall's society. He had some fresh stories to tell, some "jokes" for Guy to laugh over. Then, all of a sudden he turned and laid his hand in friendly familiarity on the other's shoulder.

"Old fellow," he said, "I wouldn't have believed you'd have fought shy!"

"What do you mean, Kendall," asked Guy, giving a little jerk to his reins. He knew perfectly well what was in his companion's thoughts; and at that instant he would gladly have avoided dragging Lenox Dare's name into the conversation.

"I mean, my boy, I should have expected you'd make a clean breast of it as soon as we had got well by ourselves. Come, Fosdick, own up!"

"Suppose you do that, Kendall," replied Guy. "Let a fellow hear what you think he has to own up to!"

The man burst into a loud laugh. "Upon my word, Fosdick, that remark is jolly!" he said. "Why you keep as close a mouth as a girl over her first lover! As though all that moonshine about the sea and a sail-boat keeping you in this Sleepy Hollow a month, could deceive me! It was all cleared up in a flash when I caught sight of that girl in the buggy

with you. You've taken to a rather callow specimen of the feminine variety this time — not long out of pinafores, I should imagine — but a live face and glorious sort of eyes. You always had good taste in wine and women, you clever young rascal!"

Austin Kendall made this speech in what he meant should be his lightest, jolliest tone; but every little while his keen eyes, with a suspicious gleam in them, flashed over Guy's face. The close of his speech, however, had its effect, and tickled his companion's vanity. Kendall was ten years older than young Fosdick, and "knew his man."

Guy laughed in his turn. "I see there is no use trying to pull the wool over your eyes, Kendall," he said. "I throw up the game. I plead guilty. I've been struck by the most glorious pair of eyes; I've been bewitched by the cleverest little brain in all creation. They have just turned my head!"

"It's a pretty cool one. I'll wager heavily it will come out all right in the end!" answered Kendall, with a laugh that did not improve the look of the mouth under the dark fringe of mustache. "You've had a rather wide experience in the flirtation line, for a fellow of your years, Guy Fosdick!"

"Rather," answered Guy, with a touch of the other's hard, cynical tone. "But I tell you, my dear fellow, this is a little different from any of the others."

"I've not the slightest doubt there," answered Kendall, letting his voice sink into a confidential tone. He affected an immense liking for young Fosdick. "It's one thing

'To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,'

to talk sentiment, sitting on the rocks and pacing the sands, with sunsets and moonrises to play the deuce with a fellow, and it's quite another thing to get up tender glances and make soft speeches in the corner of an elegant drawing-room, with your lovely Dulcinea sparkling and cooing beside you. I tell you, Fosdick, the two things are as unlike as gaslight and moonbeams. You can't have the same sort of feeling — you can't play the same *role* under such different circumstances."

"By Jupiter, Kendall, I believe you are half right!" exclaimed Guy, considerably impressed by what he regarded as the other's shrewdness. "A fellow can't be sure of himself, of what he may feel and say, when all creation has entered into a conspiracy to make a fool of him! If he wants to hold his own, he had better keep to the drawing-room and the Dulcinea on the sofa in the corner."

In this way the talk about Lenox Dare opened between Guy Fosdick and Austin Kendall. The ice once broken, Guy's first reluctance to speak of the girl soon vanished. Before the drive was over his companion had learned a good deal about the acquaintance which had begun so informally, three weeks before, on the rocks at Hampton Beach. He learned a good deal more during the two days that followed — learned it by shrewd observation and questioning, by affecting the warmest interest in all Guy's concerns, and by adroitly leading the conversation to the subject which he saw was, at this time, of supreme importance in the young man's mind.

"The fellow's in for it deeper than I suspected!"

Kendall said to himself, after one of these talks, and he took out a cigar, and paced meditatively along the grassy edge of the steep cliff which lies in front of Boar's Head, and keeps eternal watch over the sea. A little way from the shore a schooner lay at anchor, and two or three row-boats were just setting out for it, with a party of ladies and gentlemen who were going over to the Isles of Shoals. The great sails moved lazily in the light winds, the little row-boats made a pretty picture of motion and color as they swept out on the sparkling waves. The man high up on the bank seemed intent on watching them, but in reality his thoughts were elsewhere. "I can't believe," he was saying to himself, "that my young gentleman, with all his grand airs and exquisite tastes, could be seriously smashed by a half-fledged school-girl, with a pair of bright eyes! But there's no accounting for a fellow's fancies when it comes to a woman. I must get Fosdick to introduce me, and make up my mind on the evidence of my own eyes and ears!"

These were a part of Austin Kendall's thoughts that morning, as he paced the narrow, grassy path on the edge of the cliff, while the smoke of his cigar curled in the blue summer air. Other thoughts he had — mostly revolving about the same subject, but not one fine or pure — not one that was not fouled — that had not gathered some poisonous taint from the soil out of which it sprung!

While he was walking and smoking the last row-boat deposited its load on the schooner. A moment later the vessel weighed anchor and swept grandly

out to sea, the sunlight glittering on its masts, the soft winds filling its sails. A little group of men and women, apart from the others, were leaning over the side of the schooner. Austin Kendall lifted his hat and waved it gallantly to them, but, at that very moment there flashed across him something that Guy had mentioned, the night before, about an appointment he and Lenox Dare had made to visit Harvard, within a day or two.

When Kendall first proposed calling on Lenox Dare young Fosdick secretly winced. He knew, in his own soul, that he would not introduce his friend to his sisters. But Guy tried to satisfy his conscience, by telling himself he had no choice. He had his own reasons for desiring to keep on good terms with the older man. He assured himself that a single interview, in his presence, could do Lenox no harm; and then he felt curious to see the impression she would make on so shrewd a fellow as Kendall. The man's opinion of the girl would have a deeper influence on Guy than he himself suspected.

In the interview that followed Lenox Dare certainly did not appear to good advantage. She was shy and constrained, as Guy had never seen her before. She had all the while a singular feeling of oppression, much as though the fresh, bright air blowing in from the sea to the cottage-parlor, where the three sat, brought some subtle taint with it. When she looked into the keen, black eyes of Austin Kendall she was uneasily conscious of something critical and mocking, if not malign in his gaze. Before the hour of his call ended her first instinct of dislike to

this man had deepened to one of repugnance. She was angry with herself for the feeling, but she could not overcome it. She was not at all the girl Guy had hitherto known, with her contagious gaiety, her wonderful cleverness, her thorough ingenuousness. He in his turn was chagrined ; he was perfectly aware that Kendall must be secretly wondering where the charm lay on which he had constantly insisted.

Lenox drew a long breath of relief when the call was over. It had been the least agreeable hour she had ever passed in young Fosdick's society. His own feelings can be best expressed in his thought as he left the house. "That call was an infernally unlucky move on my part!"

He was quite right. Had Austin Kendall at that instant uttered his inmost conviction it would have been, "What a confounded fool the fellow has made of himself! Nothing but a bashful little idiot with a pair of big eyes!" But he was quite too wise to express himself with any such candor to Guy Fosdick.

The two young men had known each other little more than a year. Kendall's social position was not at all on a level with young Fosdick's ; but this very fact made the elder man eager to court the society of the younger ; for Kendall was ambitious, and always had his own designs in cultivating an intimacy. At the club, where they had first met, Kendall was a favorite, and had a reputation for being a capital story-teller and joker. He was tolerably well educated, he possessed a good deal of native shrewdness, he was familiar with the habits of good society, and

could assume, when it suited him, the outward bearing of a gentleman. He had been lucky in some small speculations ; he lived at a fashionable hotel ; he gave good dinners and was generous with his wines and cigars ; but the man, Austin Kendall, underneath all the mask of careless jokes and good comradeship was a scoundrel. He had no faith in the honor of man, no trust in the purity of woman. All noble character, all beautiful sentiment, all lovely and disinterested action he regarded as humbug, superstition, or hypocrisy.

Austin Kendall believed that all men and women were at bottom utterly selfish ; that all were bent on securing their own personal ends and ambitions — under different names, and by different paths certainly ; but he held that, in reality, one human being was scarcely better than another ; the race being made up in unequal parts of the weak and the wicked ; while life itself was merely a hard scramble for the prizes and the high places, where the devil always got the hindmost."

These convictions, however, Austin Kendall was too shrewd to avow on most occasions. He adroitly graduated the expression of his sentiments to the tone of the society in which he happened to find himself.

In one way and another Kendall had secured a good deal of influence over young Fosdick. Guy was attracted by the other's cleverness and good fellowship, and amused by his detracting witticisms. It was in Kendall's society that he had made his first bets at horse-racing, and tried his hand at gambling — in

short, sowed those few wild oats which he took good care should never reach the ears of his family.

The older man had managed to place the younger under slight obligations by lending him some money on two or three occasions when Guy's varied extravagances had straightened his resources. The debts had been paid, for the most part, but they had left a certain sense of obligation on Guy's side. This sense the older man would eagerly have deepened. He felt, from the beginning, that it would serve his interests to have young Fosdick in his power. Nothing would have suited him better than the existence of some dark secret between the two—some secret which would place Guy at his mercy, and give the older man a lasting hold on the younger. He felt confident something was in the wind, when young Fosdick, whose restless habits he had learned, settled himself down contentedly for weeks at Hampton Beach. Indeed Kendall's desire to "scent the new game" had quite as much to do with his appearance on the scene, as the dullness and heat which he affirmed had driven him from the city.

It was probably after his interview with Lenox Dare, that a plot, at whose blackness it seemed a fiend must have recoiled, first entered Austin Kendall's mind. That interview had, as we have seen, impressed him with a very contemptuous opinion of the girl. "The wonder was that anything so callow had managed to captivate that conceited young fop, Guy Fosdick!" Kendall had contrived to learn pretty much all that Guy knew of Lenox's history. "It appeared she was an orphan, left alone at the

beach by the backwoods people who had adopted her. Had she not been the most innocent little fool in the world she would never have consented to go off on a scatter-brained lark to Cambridge, with a young fellow of whom she knew nothing, save that he had introduced himself to her one day down on the rocks !”

In this fashion Austin Kendall reasoned. In this way the plot, whose hideousness he would not have dared to reveal to living man, took shape in his brain. He told himself he would make this visit to Cambridge serve his own ends. Unsuspected by the young people, he would follow them on a later train ; he would haunt their steps during the day, and choose his own time for making his presence known to them ; he would see to it that they did not return as they intended. He felt sure of managing Guy ; he would ply the young fellow with wine and kindle all his baser nature ; he felt no scruple for the innocent, helpless girl he was luring to her ruin ; he had no care for the young life he would spoil at its fresh blossoming ; he only gloated over the thought that the evil, once done, there would be a secret betwixt him and Guy Fosdick which the proud young fellow would sooner cut off his right hand than have the world suspect — a secret which would give him a life-long hold on the rich banker’s son.

During the two days that followed that interview with Lenox Dare Austin Kendall was like an evil genius to Guy Fosdick. He seemed to touch the other’s soul only to find some weakness, only to bring out some hidden plague-spot. All his witticisms, all his half-veiled jests, had a purpose which

he did not yet venture to bring to the light. He managed, too, with great adroitness, to have the young fellow understand his estimate of Lenox Dare. That also had its effect. If one side of young Fosdick's nature had answered to the pure, high-souled girl, there was another side that responded to Kendall's influences. More and more, as the days went on, Guy sank under that evil spell — deeper and deeper he was drawn into the snare that had been laid for him.

It was a little curious that the young people never mentioned Austin Kendall's name when they met. Some feeling, which he probably did not analyze, held Guy silent, while Lenox's inveterate dislike for the man sealed her lips.

Yet, whenever he came away from Lenox Dare some curious lines of a poem he had read long ago would come up in Guy Fosdick's memory. They haunted him almost like a conscience. Under all his pride and conceit they made him uneasy, as they kept singing on in his thoughts :

“ 'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own.”

CHAPTER XI.

BEHIND THE PAVILION.

IN a line nearly opposite the cottage where Lenox Dare was staying a little pagoda-shaped summer house stood, on a bank of stones heaped by great spring tides. It was a pleasant place to sit and look out on the sea, when its blue calm was like that of the brooding sky — when the waves played their soft, dreamy tune on the shingle.

Late in the afternoon, of a sultry day, Lenox Dare came down across the road to the summer-house. It was inclosed by a narrow circular bench. Lenox had a volume of Longfellow with her. She had a fancy to read some of her favorite poems to the soft chorus of the summer waves. These she thought might breathe some new, beautiful meanings into the words. She threw herself down on the stones and leaned against the bench. She was in no hurry to open the book. Her thoughts came and went in vague, wandering ways, like the light breezes about her. She was to visit Cambridge the next day with Guy Fosdick. He had been to see her that afternoon, and it had all been arranged between them. She wondered how it would seem to her, and if the old town would be in the least like what she imagined.

The soft air, the lulling sound of the waves, all tended to make Lenox drowsy. In a little while the blue sea, and the white, distant sails grew dim. Her lids drooped, her head sank down on the bench, and in a few minutes she was sound asleep.

She must have slept for a long time, for the sun had sunk below the horizon, and the tide had turned, when she awoke. One great cloud made a lake of yellow fire in the west. Land and sea lay enfolded in the soft brown garment of the twilight. It was such a lovely, peaceful world into which Lenox Dare awoke, from her long sleep, that it might have been the very gate of Heaven. She had just time to gaze about her, and realize where she was, when she heard voices in the arbor. Then she knew these must have awakened her.

In a moment she recognized the voices. One was Guy Fosdick's, and the other, to her amazement, was Austin Kendall's. Lenox had no idea he was still at Hampton.

The two were talking in a loud, hilarious tone. Even had it been a low one, Lenox could not have failed to catch every syllable through the thin boarding of the arbor. The young men had come up from the beach, and the little white pavilion behind which she sat hid her from sight. The girl's first impulse was to spring up and slip out of ear-shot of conversation not intended for her hearing; but before she had time to collect her senses she caught a sentence or two which rooted her to the spot.

It was Austin Kendall who spoke first, as he took out a cigar, and then passed the case to Guy.

“Well, my dear fellow, how much longer is this pretty farce, flirtation — whatever you choose to call it — to last? Do you really intend to spend the rest of the summer in this slow old town, with no other occupation than to moon round the rocks, and talk sentiment by the sea? I should fancy all that must get to be a devilish bore after a while!”

Guy laughed. Lenox had never heard him laugh in just that tone before. The truth was, he had, following Kendall's example, drunk more wine than usual at dinner.

“I can't swear how soon I shall be able to cut loose,” he replied. “Some of my class — capital fellows, too — are camping out in the Maine woods, fishing, hunting, and having jolly times generally. They wrote me last week, to join them, but when a fellow's over head and ears and all that — I say, Kendall, what's he to do?”

“You won't be at a loss, my fine fellow, how to throw up the game when you begin to grow sick of it. I confess, though, I can't quite understand the nature of your enchantment. How did that sort of Phillis contrive to take down such a fastidious young dog as you are? Did you try a rustic specimen this time by way of variety, you, who can have the pick of the charmers?”

Kendall had never ventured so free an expression of his opinion of Lenox Dare. But Guy took no offence. He was, as we have seen, a little excited with wine, and then his whole tone of thought and speech was always lowered in Kendall's society.

“By George!” he cried fervently, “you don't know

the creature, Kendall! She's got more brains, more power to hold a fellow, than a whole drawing-room of ordinary beauties. I tell you those eyes of hers, or some other fascination of the little witch, have drawn me more than once to the edge of a proposal, before I realized what I was about."

"Fosdick," said Kendall, taking his cigar from his mouth, and gravely surveying his friend, "I see you're badly smashed! I'm ready to serve you in any way I can. Does that lark to Cambridge, you were telling me about, come off to-morrow?"

"That was all arranged between us to-day," answered Guy. "We take an early train. The small young woman regards that projected trip as about the jolliest adventure of her whole life. I've done my best, too, to fan the flame of her enthusiasm," and he whistled a note or two of some gay air.

Kendall broke into a loud laugh. The sound made the bewildered, white-faced girl outside, crouch and shudder. Then he said — but I will not soil my pages by going any further into the conversation that followed. Suffice it, that, as it went on, Kendall — the wine heating his brain more and more, as it did Guy's — let his villainous purpose come partly to the light. It never bared its face to open view. The hideous features skulked behind coarse jest and foul innuendo, and vile suggestion, that admitted of more than one interpretation.

Guy Fosdick looked first dazed, then shocked, then pretended not to see Kendall's drift. He probably would not have acknowledged that he did to his own soul. But he, too, had his jest, his laugh — with a

touch of something in it that must have sent a flash of triumph through any listening demon.

Kendall watched his companion keenly. The villain was satisfied with his first tentative approach.

He did not venture, at this time, to go into any details. It was enough for him that young Fosdick had not knocked him down — had not fled from his presence as he would from the very mouth of hell!

When the two left the arbor, together, Kendall felt all the secret triumph of the wicked. His plot was bound to succeed, he thought. His hold on this youth of fortune and family would thereafter be secured. Kendall had his own plans — how to secretly follow the young people; how to pave the way to the chambers of death! All this time he had a secret contempt for young Fosdick — thought him at bottom “a shallow, conceited young aristocrat.”

The talk in the arbor did not probably consume fifteen minutes. Lenox Dare, sitting on the stones, with her head reclining on the low bench, just as she had awakened, had caught, with strained senses, every syllable, every tone. For, as the girl listened, some instinct of heart or brain had discerned Kendall's meaning — had gone straight to the foul plot — had caught at the hideous face that leered behind the masking jest and innuendo.

She heard the steps of the two men die softly along the pebbly shore before she stirred; but it was into another world that Lenox Dare lifted the head she had laid down a little while before to sweet slumbers, to happy dreams. Her face was livid; her eyes were wide and strained; her teeth chattered in the warm summer night.

It could never be to her the same world, she thought — never what it had been when she laid down to sleep — God's happy world of summer land, and shining sea, and blue heaven of sky ; it was a place where demons stalked abroad to ravage and devour ; it was the home of all unclean creatures, of all foul deeds !

Terribly as Lenox Dare must, under any circumstances, have been shocked by a revelation of the peril that had come so close to her, her horror was doubly enhanced by her previous ignorance of the world. In a moment the gulf had opened, the awful Valley of Gehenna been revealed to her.

It seemed to the poor child that she could never be glad or gay again — that she had come so near the evil that the foul, leprous taint must cling to her forever. Her thoughts leaped in a flash over the last three weeks — took in every event of her acquaintance with Guy Fosdick ; she gasped for breath, and writhed ; a low, sharp moan of exceeding agony broke from her lips ; her conduct now seemed something unpardonable in her own eyes — it was fatuous, mad, criminal. At this time, as years before, her vivid imagination turned her enemy and tormented her. In the agony of her remorse she shrank from the thought of meeting any human being. Above all, how could she look Ben Mavis or his mother in the face ! She remembered their reluctance at going off and leaving her alone by the sea. And she had met their fears with her light jest, with her careless laugh ; she had not known that the spoiler was in the world ; she could have no instinct that he might cross her way !

And the waves sang on below, the same happy song they had been singing for hours, and the moon rose in white splendor over the sea, and the night was something closer and diviner than all the glory of the vanished day; but Lenox Dare saw nothing of all this; she sat there in the shadow of the little pavilion, with her hands clasped around her knees; but she was out in the desert, and she heard the cry of the wolves on her track; she was in the wide, lonely wilderness, and the air was filled with the flapping of unclean wings, with the mocking and laughter of hunting fiends!

It was, at least, two hours since the young men had left the little summer-house, and Lenox had hardly stirred in that time. To one watching a little way out at sea, the slight, dim figure in the shadow of the summer-house might have seemed a spell-bound naiad—at least, that was what somebody thought on first catching sight of the girl after he had mounted a low ledge of stones at a point only a few yards from where she sat. It was Guy Fosdick.

For the last half hour he had been searching for Lenox. At the house, where he had gone first, he learned she had not yet been in to supper. Her outdoor habits sufficiently accounted for her absence. Guy had gone to various of her favorite haunts in quest of her. He was too much fascinated to feel quite easy if she were long out of his sight. Even Kendall could not succeed in holding him more than a few hours.

But it was no part of the former's plan to interpose any obstacles to Guy's interviews with Lenox Dare.

The more deeply the young fool was bewitched, the more easy to manage him, Kendall had reasoned.

Guy stood still for a moment, watching the motionless figure. There was an amused expression in his eyes. He thought of the time he had first caught sight of Lenox Dare sitting on the rocks, with the tides rising about her. The sea and the moonlight had spell-bound her again, he thought. In a moment he stepped forward, calling gayly, "Ah, you truant, you have transformed yourself into a sea-goddess again, and are Thetis once more keeping watch over your waves!"

When she heard the voice she sprang to her feet, as though she had been stung by a sudden blow. Guy saw the white young face, the burning eyes under the cloud of dark hair.

"Stop!" she said.

The low voice, the slight, imperious gesture, made him pause. The moonlight shone full upon the faces of both, for a moment, as they looked at each other.

"What is the matter, Lenox?" exclaimed Guy in a startled tone, and he drew nearer. They were only a few yards from each other.

Was it that slight gesture again, was it the white face, was it the burning eyes that stopped him once more? In a moment she spoke again in a low keyed, steady voice. "I was sitting outside when you and that man came into the arbor. I had fallen asleep. Your voice woke me up. *I heard what you said to each other there!*"

"The devil you did!" Guy burst out. Then he stood still, and his face was white — white almost as

Lenox Dare's. Had there been time for a second thought she would probably never have told Guy what she had overheard. In the shock which his sudden presence gave her the words had forced themselves from her lips. In the instant of silence that followed, the two white young faces confronted each other.

Then, with a desperate effort at self-exculpation, Guy burst out: "It was all that villain Kendall's work. I was a fool, I know, for listening to his vile stuff, though I never dreamed of what was coming, and was not altogether myself, for the fiend had been forcing his wine on me at dinner. A fellow doesn't like to make that sort of confession to a girl. I wish the foul-tongued villain had never crossed my path, but the talk you overheard was his, not mine, Lenox Dare!"

She stood quite still, her great accusing eyes staring at him while he was speaking. But she hardly knew what he said. It seemed every moment as though the live pain at her heart would break into a cry. Without uttering a word, without making a sign, she turned and left him.

He too stood still and watched her—a slight, girlish figure, moving up the sandy road in the moonlight, and he knew she was going from him forever—knew that she must always think of him with loathing and horror—knew that he must hereafter seem to the pure soul of this girl something too vile for her to name!

He ground his teeth together. A tumult of rage, passion, remorse was in his soul. He had always

plumed himself on being a gentleman. What had he proved himself to this girl? At that moment all that was best and strongest in the soul of Guy Fosdick awoke and mastered him. All his pride and conceit, all the influences and ambitions of a life were swallowed up in the supreme passion of the moment. It seemed as though he and Lenox Dare were alone in the universe. One supreme desire possessed him. That was to rehabilitate himself in this girl's opinion. If he could only prove to her that he was not the villain she took him for there was nothing he was not ready to dare — nothing he would not sacrifice! What was there he could do? While he asked himself this question the slender, girlish figure was growing dimmer up the road, in the silver mists of moonlight.

Guy Fosdick gave a sudden start. A new idea flashed through him. His pulses leaped. There *was* one way in which he might prove to Lenox Dare that he was not — what he had seemed those few minutes in the arbor.

He remembered his family — his proud old name — his place in the world. Then a look of mighty resolve lifted his face into some nobler expression than it had ever worn before; and the watching moon looked down and saw it. She saw him suddenly lift his hand and snap his fingers. That simple act was the sublimest of Guy Fosdick's life. It meant a defiance of all that had hitherto been his world.

“Let it go!” he cried, “I will prove myself a man!” And he started up the road after the figure that had grown dim in the moonlight.

Lenox Dare had almost reached the gate of the cottage when Guy Fosdick suddenly sprang before her. She gave one little startled cry and then stood still. She had not heard his steps in the soft sand as they approached her. He too stood still, drawing a deep breath or two before he spoke. "Lenox," he began, and his voice shook with the passion of feeling behind it, "I have come to prove to you I was not the villain I seemed. I have come to ask you, what I never asked any woman before: Lenox Dare, *will you be my wife?*"

"Your wife! Your wife!" gasped the girl.

"Yes," he went on rapidly, but with a life-and-death earnestness in every syllable. "This very night — to-morrow — any day you will name, so that it will be soon! I ask this, not because I seek to make any reparation for what has happened, but because I love you better than I supposed I ever could love anything in the world. You can make another and a nobler man of me. For your sake I am ready to give up all my old ambitions and idols. Let them go! Let me hear you say you will be mine, Lenox!" He drew a step nearer. There was a light in his eyes such as had never shone on any woman before.

She stopped him again, with that light, imperious wave of her hand, which set him at such an infinite remoteness. "Marry you, Guy Fosdick — *you!*" she said. Her voice was low, but it was full of unutterable amazement and horror. At that moment the young girl's look and tone might have become a roused princess to whom some low-born hind had dared to offer his hand.

But all this only inflamed the lover's passion. All the heart, all the courage, all the manhood of Guy Fosdick spoke now. They probably would never speak so again. This was, without doubt, the noblest hour of his life; and it is no small thing for a man to forget himself, to put aside the teachings and traditions of his life, even for an hour.

Guy Fosdick gave a sort of groan in which wrath, tenderness, dismay, all had a share. Then his voice broke into impassioned pleading again. "But hear what I am offering you, Lenox Dare, before you answer me in that terrible way! I offer you an old, honorable name, and the fortune I inherit with it. As my wife you will have the highest social position; you will meet the people that a nature like yours can alone really enjoy; you will have every opportunity to develop and cultivate yourself. Wealth, ease, a refined and elegant home — these, life's great prizes — are what I offer you. You are so young — you know so little of the world that you may not understand their true value now, but you will see it later, and bitterly repent, if you put away all that I bring you to-night — all that will never come to you again. Don't let your grief and anger blind you, Lenox! If I did not hold you in the most absolute respect in my whole thought and heart do you think I could stand here and plead in this way! Do you not see I am paying you the highest tribute a man can pay to a woman! I know you better than you know yourself; I know that I can make your future proud and happy as no other man ever can. Come to me — try me, Lenox — say that you will be my wife!"

She was young, as he said. Had she been older she would no doubt have listened to this speech with a larger comprehension of the man's mood and feeling. For Guy Fosdick had spoken from his heart. Nobody would have doubted that who saw his deadly-pale face in the moonlight — who heard the tones of his pleading, impassioned voice. But a mood — even though it be all powerful — though it may possess one wholly for the time — does not make a man.

Lenox Dare had not in the least recovered from the recoil and horror of the last hours. Young Fosdick's offer, coming thus swiftly on all that had passed, was a fresh shock — was, to her inexperience, a new outrage. All her grief and shame quivered again. It seemed blasphemy for this man to dare to talk to her of love, marriage, in the face of all that had passed! "Honorable name — wealth — ease — elegant home!" She went over the words slowly, as though she were trying to make them quite clear to herself. Then she turned on him with an awful scorn in her bright, wide eyes — in her young, white face. "Do you think so meanly of me?" she asked. "Do you imagine such things could tempt me? *You* make me happy, Guy Fosdick, when I can never be that again, because I must always remember these three weeks we have been together!" Her voice faltered there, but, in a moment, the white, tremulous face grew calm again. "Marry you!" said Lenox Dare, in low, quiet tones, and with that little, involuntary gesture which set such infinite spaces between them. Sooner than do that I would lie down and die here, this minute!"

With these words she turned and left him; and again he stood still and watched the slight, girlish figure as it went steadily up the bare, sandy road, in the moonlight, and passed inside the cottage gate.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF GUY FOSDICK.

THE lights from the cottage parlor streamed out into the road. Guy Fosdick could see through the open windows the single occupant of the room, a lady-boarder, who sat reading by the table. He recognized the profile at a glance. It was that of a lady whom he had known from boyhood, and who frequently visited at his house. She had come down to the sea the week before, and was staying under the same roof with Lenox Dare. Guy had met Mrs. Endicott several times at the cottage. He had introduced Lenox to her.

In a moment he saw the girl enter the room. The lady, he thought, must have called to her as she passed the door. She gave her a letter. And as Lenox took this, and was turning away, Mrs. Endicott detained her with some remark.

All this passed in a few seconds. But in that brief time, Guy Fosdick, standing in the moonlit road, just as Lenox had left him, his whole being in a tumult of shame, desperation, and something which, if it was not love, resembled that emotion more nearly than anything he had ever felt before — in those few mo-

ments Guy Fosdick had come to a sudden resolve. He never could have formed it in any other mood — at any other moment of his life. But Lenox's terrible words were still ringing in his ears — through his soul. The dread lest he deserved them half-maddened him. If he could prove that he was not all she believed him — prove it to her, to himself, to the universe! For at that moment he seemed to stand there transfixed, branded — he who had hitherto made it his chief pride and loftiest aim to be a gentleman — after his code and kind. But his masque of conceits and vanities had suddenly fallen, and he saw something that made him recoil; something that made whatever courage and manliness he had at bottom take up arms against it.

There was, after all, a better side to this Guy Fosdick than the one I have been showing you. Once in his life he proved this. In the passion of that time, his thought and his purpose followed each other, as the thunderbolt follows the lightning.

Lenox Dare had almost reached the door when there came a sudden knock, and the next instant Guy Fosdick was in the room. His face was livid, but every line was set with some life-and-death resolve. His sudden reappearance after what had passed, and some look in his eyes, gave the girl a fresh shock. She stood breathless, motionless, in dread of what was coming.

She had not long to wait. Guy approached the lady at the table, and, bowing to her, said in a voice steady and clear as voices are when they speak from the soul, “Mrs. Endicott, you have known me

from my boyhood, and I believe you have always regarded me as an honorable man — as one who would keep his word ?”

“ I certainly never had any doubt of it, Mr. Fosdick,” answered the lady, a good deal startled, but with her usual graciousness of manner.

“ Then, Mrs. Endicott, you will believe I mean what I say, when I declare, in your presence, that I desire to make this young lady, Miss Lenox Dare, my wife ; and that I am ready to marry her to-night, if she will consent to take me, and if you will be present to witness our union.”

For a little while, Mrs. Endicott was too dumb-founded to open her lips. She sat still, staring from one young face to the other. At last the blank amazement cleared up a little in her eyes, and she said, turning to Lenox, and resuming the half-patronizing air which had become second nature with her : “ My dear, you heard what Mr. Fosdick has just said. It is your place to reply to him.”

Lenox moved forward a step ; her face was deadly pale. It had been so when she entered the room. Mrs. Endicott thought the girl was worn out with one of her imprudent walks. She had recovered from the bewilderment into which Guy’s sudden entrance had thrown her ; she seemed perfectly calm, though her heart fluttered, and her nerves shivered.

She looked Guy in the face steadily, as she had done out there in the moonlight.

“ Mr. Fosdick,” she said, “ you had my answer a few moments ago. Do not compel me to repeat what I said then.”

There was a little sharp entreaty in the last words. The long agitation was beginning to tell heavily on soul and body.

The young man was himself under too great a strain to protract the interview. He had done what he could. He walked to the door without uttering a word. Then he turned to the elder woman, and said, "You at least, Mrs. Endicott, believe that I have to-night, in good faith, offered my heart and hand to Lenox Dare?"

"I believe it, certainly, Mr. Fosdick," answered the lady; but she thought to herself she had never in all her life been so nearly stunned.

When he had reached the door, Guy turned and looked at Lenox. She knew what the entreaty in his eyes meant. There was a new look in his face, too — the exultant consciousness that he had proved himself a man of courage and honor. In that higher mood to which he had risen he did not even blench when the thought flashed across him, "What a breeze this affair will make about Beacon Hill! Mrs. Endicott will never be able to hold her tongue."

Lenox did not stir to the dumb entreaty of those eyes. Then Guy bowed to her and went out.

Mrs. Endicott spoke now, with the air of one whose years and position gave her a certain authority: "My dear, the young man wishes to speak with you. After the offer he has just made you, you cannot refuse so small a favor."

A shadow of doubt and pain wavered for a moment over Lenox's face. Then, without a word, she rose and went out.

Guy had not reached the gate when he heard the door open, and, turning, he saw Lenox standing on the threshold. He came back instantly.

"Thank you for coming, Lenox," he said, gratefully and eagerly.

And then the two stood still a moment, and they looked in each other's faces; and each knew that it was for the last time.

"Will you not do me this one last grace, Lenox?" said Guy, solemnly. "Will you not tell me you believe I was in earnest in what I said to-night, tell me that you believe, in spite of — what you know — there was a better side to me, and that I was ready to dare and live all that I said?"

There was a little pause. Into the stillness her voice came, shaken a good deal, and hardly above a whisper: "I believe you were in earnest, Guy Fosdick. I shall always try to remember that when I think of you."

The tears actually shone in the young fellow's eyes; but Lenox's were bright and dry with pain.

"If you will shake hands with me once more; it will be for the last time!" he said.

Again she wavered a moment. Then she said solemnly: "If you will promise from this hour to end all acquaintance with that man — if you will promise that you and he shall be as the dead to each other, I will shake hands with you."

"I swear it, Lenox," he answered.

She placed her hand in his. How cold hers was! He felt the shudder that thrilled it; but he held it a moment closely, and looked in her face as he had

never looked in the face of woman before ; and then, without another word, he went away, through the wet grass, in the summer moonlight.

Lenox Dare went to her own room, and sat down by the window. Mrs. Endicott, when she came upstairs a little later, found the girl there. Something in the attitude of that young, solitary figure struck the woman. She had come up-stairs now, impelled partly by curiosity, partly by some generous feeling. The scene she had witnessed between the young people had quite startled her out of her usual decorous calm. Mrs. Endicott's own life had been smooth, and shielded, and prosperous. Her soft gray curls shaded cheeks which still held bloom enough for their owner to be vain of them. She was not fitted, either by nature or experience, to enter into Lenox's feelings ; but she told herself that the young girl needed, at this critical point of her life, some judicious and friendly adviser. Mrs. Endicott set a high estimate on her own qualifications for that *role*. Then she had taken a certain liking to Lenox. That glowing joyous girlhood had attracted the woman. Mrs. Endicott had daughters of her own, too, and what faint maternal instincts she had to spare for anything outside of herself were aroused. She came in with a soft tap at the door, with a slight rustle of her dress, and seated herself at the foot of the bed, a little way from the figure in that silver cloud of moonlight, by the window.

"My dear child," she began, answering the startled look in the girl's eyes, "I have no curiosity to pry into your affairs." The lady had no idea this little,

tactful opening was a falsehood. "But I cannot refrain from coming up here to give you the counsel of one old enough to be your mother. I cannot, of course, imagine the motives which made you refuse the young man's offer. There could, at least, be no question of his earnestness in this matter. Girls of your age are sometimes rash — blind to their own best interests. Had you taken time to reflect you might not have made up your mind so absolutely. Young people are always liable to misunderstandings, to take mortal offense on very slight grounds. You ought not to act hastily where so much is at stake for yourself, Miss Dare."

Before she came up-stairs Mrs. Endicott had pictured to herself the dismay of the Fosdicks had they witnessed the scene which had occurred in the low-roofed parlor. She had told herself she would be on her guard — she would assume no responsibility at this critical juncture; but she was too eager to get at Lenox's secret to adhere closely to her programme.

There was a little silence. Then Lenox's voice came through the moonlight, almost like a cry — a cry of pain and of passionate determination: "Nothing can make any difference between us, Mrs. Endicott. Nothing can make me change — what I said to-night. It is all settled, forever!"

She could not lay bare her heart to this soft-voiced, fine-mannered lady. Wild horses, it seemed to Lenox, could not have torn the secret of that afternoon from her lips.

Mrs. Endicott felt a good deal baffled and chagrined at this reply. She was not a woman given

to romancing; but, as she gazed at Lenox, a thousand extravagant theories arose in her mind to account for this singular behavior.

A sudden sense came over her of the grand fortune that had fallen to this girl, and that she was so imperiously thrusting aside. Mrs. Endicott was quite ignorant of Lenox's history, beyond the few facts she had learned in their brief conversations; but she did know that a splendid matrimonial prize had fallen to her lot; and an honest impulse of pity for her rashness and ignorance in rejecting her rare fortune impelled the lady to speak again. "What if it were one of my own girls?" she thought.

"My dear," she said again, and this time there was a touch of genuine feeling in the lady's voice, "you are very young, and you know so little of the world, that you can have no idea what you are putting away from you when you refuse an offer of marriage from Guy Fosdick. He is the heir of one of the oldest and wealthiest, and proudest families in Boston. There is not a girl in all his wide circle who would not feel herself honored by the proposal he has just made you. Then think of all he is in himself — cultured, high-bred, a perfect gentleman in manner and feeling. Why the beauties and belles of his own set are half wild over him; and you treat this gallant lover, this honorable gentleman, with cool disdain! You cannot realize what you are doing. I have daughters of my own; and I speak to you, my dear, as I would to one of them. You may live to see your mistake when it is too late."

Mrs. Endicott's speech was the echo of Guy Fos-

dick's, in the moonlit road. The voices of the two seemed almost, to Lenox's excited imagination, to mingle into one. She could not recoil from Mrs. Endicott as she had from Guy Fosdick, when he sought to move her in a more impassioned strain, but with the same arguments.

"Don't! oh, don't!" groaned out Lenox, and involuntarily she lifted her hands with a swift, supplicating gesture. The next moment, however, she forced herself to be calm. She turned to the lady, and looked her in the face with bright, unflinching eyes. "I understand it all, Mrs. Endicott," she said. "You mean to be very kind; but you must forgive me for asking you not to say any more. It cannot change anything—it can only pain me."

She said this with such an air of quiet, womanly dignity, that Mrs. Endicott could hardly recognize her for the girl she had hitherto known. But there was no more to be said. The lady made some gracious apologies, and rustled out of the room, dreadfully puzzled and baffled.

When Mrs. Endicott was alone once more she was quite amazed at her own indiscretion. She congratulated herself that the Fosdicks would never know what she had said that night. She would have given those proud people mortal offence had she forwarded by word or act such a mesalliance as they would have regarded Guy's marriage with Lenox Dare.

When Austin Kendall called at young Fosdick's door the next morning he learned that Guy had left Hampton by the earliest train. The man's profound amazement at this news was succeeded by a feeling of intense mortification and rage.

“What the devil,” he asked himself, “had made the young fellow clear out without a word or sign?” Kendall had told himself, as he rose that morning, that “the game was in his hands!” He saw now that it had slipped out of them in some mysterious fashion. As he realized this there was an ugly flash in the eyes of the baffled villain, and a fierce twist of the mouth under his black moustache.

Austin Kendall made up his mind, with an oath, to get out of Hampton by the next train. He never learned, though he did his best to find out, what was at the bottom of Guy’s sudden departure that morning. He only knew that young Fosdick had dropped him forever.

Before many days had elapsed Guy was no doubt glad that Lenox had not taken him at his word. Remorse — passion — shame — all the strong emotions of the hour, had hurried him into an offer of marriage. But when, in a calmer mood, he looked back on the events of that night; when time and absence had weakened the charm which had exercised such a powerful influence over him, young Fosdick must have flinched at the thought of all his rash, romantic marriage would have involved. He must have pictured to himself the family consternation and wrath, the jests of the club, the gossip of the world; and he must have felt secretly relieved that he was not called to pay the price which his marriage with Lenox Dare would have cost him.

All the same, Guy Fosdick never doubted that, in the moment when he stood wincing under the scorn and wrath of the high-souled girl, he had felt the

noblest impulse of his life, that he had been something manlier and better than he would ever be again.

In later years, the prosperous, courted man of the world would recall that story of his youth — a story he never repeated, even to the beautiful, fashionable woman he had married. And while he smoked his cigar or sipped his claret he would say to himself: "If that girl had married me I should be a different man to-day!"

He was probably mistaken. A man who has the right stuff in him will be likely to prove it without a woman to help him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABOUT BEN MAVIS.

THE letter which Mrs. Endicott had given Lenox brought good news. Mrs. Mavis and her son intended to be at Hampton within three days. No tidings could have been so welcome. But the days, as they dragged over her, seemed endless to Lenox Dare. She was alone now; even Mrs. Endicott had gone; and Lenox was left by the sea, to the solitude and pain of her own thoughts, to the misery of a mood that for awhile robbed the world of its brightness and joy.

You would not have known the girl — silent, listless, brooding — for the happy, radiant creature of weeks before; she hardly knew herself; she seemed a changed being to her own consciousness. Soul and body reacted with slow painfulness from the shock they had received.

Nature, too, seemed at this time to be in mysterious sympathy with Lenox's mood. After weeks of almost unvarying brightness the wind veered, and a northeast storm drove in upon the coast. Clouds of cold, dreary gray lowered thick over sea and land. Lenox came and went those days regardless of wind or rain, her eyes shining at times in a bright, scared

way. The people at the house did not know what to make of her. They attributed the change in her to loneliness and homesickness, and did their best, with imperfect success, to cheer her. She wandered off in the thick, gray fogs, she heard the deafening roar of the waves as they hurled themselves in white fury upon the sands, she listened to the thunder of the storm far out at sea. Voices of wrath and pain, cries of agony and despair, seemed to rise from the deep heart of the ocean. Through all the wild tumult of the storm she caught the wail of an awful secret, of an infinite sorrow! She had, at times, an uncanny look, wandering about among the mists with the wet hair blown about her cheeks, and the strange, shocked look in her bright eyes.

She had hardly in her life known the sensation of fear; but there were times now when she started with a sudden terror, half fancying she heard footsteps behind her, or the fiendish ring of Austin Kendall's laugh, as she heard it that night in the arbor. Even the memory of it made the girl shiver from head to foot; she would hurry home, and reach her room panting with haste and fright, and shut herself up there for hours. She tried to read, to divert herself in all sorts of ways, packing and unpacking her trunk several times a day, in order to escape from her thoughts and memories; but the horror was too recent; she could not put away what still hung in the very air about her. Her perfect health alone saved her from a brain-fever at this crisis.

But even now, Lenox Dare's sharpest misery was not for herself. Despite the quivering of her nerves,

the wild terror that at moments overcame her, she felt in her deepest soul that she had escaped; the snare had been set, the toils prepared in vain for their victim. She thanked God for that, almost with every breath she drew. But the awful thought was forever coming up that, as Austin Kendall was in the world, so there must be other monsters after his kind, and there were other lives to be spoiled — young, innocent lives like her own! It was this thought that made the bitterest anguish of those three days by the sea, that made her feel the world could never wear the same look — never be the same happy world she had known.

At the end of the three days Mrs. Mavis and Ben returned. When Lenox saw the dear faces, she gave a cry of joy — not very loud, but it was one that might have come from a lost child, who, after long wanderings and perils, catches a glimpse of its home among distant trees.

In her first gladness Lenox could see that Mrs. Mavis looked pale and worn. In a little while the girl had learned the secret of her friends' protracted absence. Ben's aunt, after the arrival of her relatives, had grown rapidly worse, and had died during their visit. They had withheld the tidings lest they should add a deeper shade to Lenox's loneliness. Her letters, overflowing with life and brightness, had gone far to allay the anxiety which both had felt for the young girl they had left behind, in a world utterly new to her.

The time which the three had intended to be absent was now nearly gone. The varied little pro-

gramme of travel and sight-seeing had been spoiled. It was no time to visit the great northern cities, while they lay parched with dust, and sweltering with midsummer heats. Nobody was just now in a mood for fresh scenes. While they debated their next movements, each felt a secret longing for the home that waited, in its shaded quiet among the hills. But it was Lenox who, in the midst of the counsel, broke out suddenly: "I don't want to see any new places. There is nothing in the world like Briarswild. Let us go back there at once!"

"And we will carry out our old programme, or make a new one, next autumn," rejoined Ben, in a tone whose cheerfulness showed how heartily he accepted Lenox's ultimatum.

The next day they started for Briarswild.

Lenox had been at home for a week. Among familiar scenes, in the midst of the old, happy life, the girl gradually came to herself. Her bright, healthy nature shook off the nightmare which had hung around her, and she was once more the centre of life and joy in the household.

Yet Lenox Dare was conscious of a change in herself — one that must last through all her life. That terrible hour behind the little sea-arbor was a gulf which separated her past from her present. An awful knowledge had come to her in a moment. She could never again be the young girl who had gone down to the sea in happy ignorance that summer afternoon.

One day, when Mrs. Mavis awoke from a short nap, she found Lenox sitting on a low stool by the

lounge. A grave look in the girl's eyes startled the woman.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, sitting up suddenly.

"Something happened to me while I was at Hampton — something you do not know!"

"That was what Ben said when he first saw you," answered the mother. "I thought it was nothing but your staying so long all alone in that strange place."

"No, it was not that," answered Lenox, in a low, impressive voice. "I have been waiting all this time to tell you; because, while it was so near, I could not speak of it."

"Was it so serious as that, Lenox?" asked Mrs. Mavis, a good deal startled by the girl's manner.

An hour after she had asked that question Mrs. Mavis knew the whole story.

After Lenox began talking, the woman suddenly put her arm about the girl as though she would hold her back from some impending evil. The grasp tightened as the story went on. Mrs. Mavis did not once interrupt it by a word. She learned, in shuddering silence, what peril had menaced the young speaker.

"Oh, can you ever forgive me?" said Lenox, her voice breaking suddenly from its calmness into a passionate sob as she concluded. She had pondered her acquaintance with Guy Fosdick until girlish indiscretion began to seem heinous in her own eyes.

"Lenox," said Mrs. Mavis, in her tenderest voice, "it is only myself whom I shall find it hard to forgive."

Lenox's eyes flashed a look of amazement through their tears.

“I let you go out into the world, my child, ignorant and innocent, as though it were a Garden of Eden. I should have warned you of the wickedness of men, of the perils that were lurking all around you. But I hated to touch your simplicity. It was lovely to me as the bloom on my roses. My poor child, what a price you have paid for my mistake!”

Lenox, became, in her turn, the comforter.

“You meant it all for the best, dear Mrs. Mavis. I ought to have seen clearer for myself. What a blind folly it all seems now on my part!”

She said these words half to herself. Mrs. Mavis was saying the same to her own soul; for Lenox had written with perfect frankness of her acquaintance with Guy Fosdick, and of all the new interests and pleasures he had brought into her life.

Perhaps, under other circumstances, Mrs. Mavis would have felt some uneasiness at this growing intimacy; but, absorbed with anxiety for the sick woman, she was heartily thankful that Lenox had found something to brighten those lonely days by the sea-shore. She could not forgive herself for her fatuity.

She began to realize for the first time that Lenox was no longer a child. She actually had had an offer of marriage! Whatever else he had done, Guy Fosdick must have made that in good faith. But Mrs. Mavis saw that Lenox had returned to Briars-wild as heart and fancy-free as when she left it. There could be no mistaking her recoil at the memory of those three weeks' intimacy with young Fosdick. Mrs. Mavis thanked God that the stranger, with

his fine talk and elegant manners, had not wiled away the heart of her darling.

Ben Mavis saw that something was the matter. His mother had a startled, distrait look, such as he had never seen in her face before, and every little while she would turn and gaze at Lenox with tender, wistful eyes — at times, he fancied, with some terror in them. Young Mavis was wonderfully keen. He had, as his mother's remark proved, an instinct when he met Lenox, on his return to Hampton, that all had not gone well with her. But that fancy had almost vanished from his mind as the girl brightened into her old self when they were once more at Briarswild. His old suspicions now returned with fresh vividness. For the first time, too, he began to associate the change he had perceived in Lenox with young Fosdick. She had written with as much freedom to him as to his mother about the agreeable acquaintance she had formed so oddly on the rocks; and Ben had felt honestly glad that "the fellow had turned up in the nick of time!"

It struck him now, however, that she had never, since their return, voluntarily alluded to her new acquaintance. Ben had expected to meet young Fosdick, and was surprised to learn from Lenox that he had been gone several days. He remembered all this now as he pondered his mother's singular manner.

The next time the two were alone together Ben startled the woman by saying suddenly, "Mother, something has happened to Lenox!"

"How do you know that, Ben?" asked his mother, quite thrown off her guard.

“Because I saw and mentioned it when we first returned to Hampton. Whatever the trouble is I am confident that fellow, young Fosdick, is at the bottom of it!”

“O Ben!” exclaimed his mother, and then she was silent. But the tone of her exclamation virtually admitted everything. Mrs. Mavis had been taken unawares. But she now reflected that, as Ben’s suspicions were aroused, it was best he should know the truth. She was confident, too, that Lenox would acquiesce in her judgment.

As young Mavis listened to his mother’s story a terrible storm shook his soul. Wrath, horror, pity, by turns possessed him. There were moments when the soft-hearted young fellow set his jaws with the dark fury of a savage. He had never been possessed by such a demon of rage. His eyes blazed—he panted to spring upon Austin Kendall, and, in one instant, throttle the breath out of the villain—he longed to lay his hands on Guy Fosdick in blows that would have left their mark on his dainty flesh to the last hour of his life; he walked the room—a savage vengeance, a murderous passion suddenly sprung to life in one who was tender as a woman to every animal that knew him for its master.

Even his mother did not dream of the storm that was raging in him. It was not one of the kind that finds relief in words. She saw him pace the room with set jaws and blazing eyes. Sometimes she heard a low half-groan, half-growl, from his lips. But she was herself too agitated by the events she was relating to be fully conscious of her son’s excitement.

He could not bear that even his mother should see him while the storm was at work in his soul — he left her soon after she had finished her story. “Some other time I will talk over this devil’s business,” he muttered, as he went away.

In the hall he ran suddenly upon Lenox. She had just come in from out-doors, and was humming some gay tune to herself. She had felt happier ever since she had told Mrs. Mavis.

Ben stood still, and stared at her like one distraught. When she caught the look in his eyes, the smile with which she had glanced up at him faded.

“O Ben, has your mother told you?” she gasped, her thought leaping at once to the truth.

For an instant her cheeks, her whole face, were scarlet. The next moment she turned very white; she drew close to him.

“Are you angry with me, Ben — do you blame me?” she cried out, with a sharp, appealing cry.

“No, Lenox,” he said, in a low voice, “I do not blame you.” And he laid his hand softly on her hair.

Something surged through him which made the strong man weak, something before which his fierce wrath died within him. A sudden tenderness shook his whole being. He knew now that the rage which had been a devouring fire within him had been for Lenox’s sake — not for his own — knew that he loved the girl who stood there, not dreaming of his feeling, with all the tenderness and passion of his young manhood!

It came upon him so suddenly that he grew shy

as a woman. His heart throbbed wildly; his lips trembled when he tried to speak. He smiled down on her, and something in the look of his eyes — they were wonderfully frank, bright eyes — touched Lenox's heart.

But he left her without saying a word, and plunged blindly into the deep, grassy lane at the back of the house.

One evening, a week from that time, Ben Mavis and Lenox Dare came out to walk the piazza. It was a sultry night. The faintest of winds awoke, and then died away in the leaves. The new moon smiled, pale and sweet above the hills, and then left the sky alone with its stars.

There had been no further allusion between them to what had happened at the sea-shore. Mrs. Mavis had explained to Lenox her motives for acquainting her son with the story. The girl's reply at once set to rest any lurking anxiety she might have felt about betraying another's secret.

"When I saw he knew, I was glad. You acted for the best, dear Mrs. Mavis, as you always do."

But the thought of what Lenox had barely escaped was never absent from the heart of the mother and son.

The young people walked awhile almost in silence. They listened to the faint sighing of the winds, to all the soft sounds that broke the stillness of the mid-summer night. The flowers drank in the dews, and breathed out fresh sweetness on the air.

At last Lenox spoke: "It must be dreadfully hot down in the valleys, to-night, Ben."

"It must be, Lenox."

"How glad I am we are up here in the cool of the hills! O Ben, Briarswild is the one place in the world — I never want to go away from it again!"

He felt the shudder that thrilled her; he knew what was in her thought.

"Do you really feel like that, Lenox?" he asked, hardly knowing that he spoke.

"Can you doubt it," she answered, softly, half reproachfully, "knowing, as you do, what Briarswild has been to me?"

There was another little silence. The talk had suddenly awakened the bitterest and the tenderest memories of Lenox's life. She recalled the night when she first stood, a friendless, houseless wanderer, on that piazza. She remembered the outstretched hands, the tender welcome that had met her, the love and care that had nursed her back to life and hope, and that in all these years had never failed her; she remembered what the world outside had been to her — the miseries she had fled from at Cherry Hollows, the dangers that had haunted her at Hampton Beach. Briarswild had indeed been to this girl a Paradise in all the wild wilderness of the world.

Her heart glowed in that hour with unutterable gratitude and tenderness toward the two who had made the gladness of her young life.

Ben Mavis was thinking, too — thoughts that made his strong heart tremble — thoughts that Lenox's words had awakened in him. Why should he not tell her now that this Briarswild which she loved waited for her — that if she would only say the word, she should be its proud young mistress from that hour.

No doubt Lenox would have been greatly startled — she had never dreamed of Ben Mavis in the light of a lover — but he was the only man in the world for whom she cared. There could be little doubt, had he asked her at that moment, what her answer would have been.

Even Ben Mavis, who was not vain, had that night, and ever afterward, few misgivings as to the fate his offer would have met. In his inmost soul he felt assured that he might have led Lenox Dare from that midsummer night of stars and flowers, he might have stood with her before his mother, and said, “This is your future daughter-in-law!”

And he knew the woman would have welcomed the girl — would have blessed them both with joyful tears.

While he was pondering he found Lenox had slipped from his side. She was back again almost before he had time to realize her absence.

He could see in the dim light that she carried in her hand a freshly-blossomed tea-rose. It had been the solitary flower on a bush he had planted for her in the spring. She had watched eagerly for the blossoming. She knew Ben’s liking for tea-roses. In her rush of grateful feeling she had suddenly darted off to pluck for him her one rare flower.

“Wait a moment, Ben!” she said, stopping him in the square of light that shone out from the hall. She bent down and fastened the flower in the button-hole of his light coat. Then she looked up suddenly in his face, and he saw the smile that shone in her eyes.

A wave of overpowering tenderness swept through

him. A mighty impulse almost overmastered him. He leaned forward, he opened his lips to speak. The next instant he would have caught that girlish figure and held it with passionate tenderness to his heart.

What stayed him? To this day Ben Mavis could not tell. Was there any subtle, counter influence at work? Did any warning whisper come through the soft, midsummer night about him? It was the pivotal moment of his destiny and hers!

For some mysterious reason Ben Mavis paused at that instant. He mastered by a strong effort the impulse that was urging him to speak — to seize her in his strong, tender arms.

“Another time will do as well,” he said to himself; and in a moment he thanked her, with a voice that shook a little, for the flower she had brought him.

Yet all the time he was wondering what had withheld him from speaking. He always wondered when he looked back on that night and saw how his own fate and hers had trembled in the balance; but — a little for his own sake, a great deal more for Lenox Dare's — there never came a time when Ben Mavis regretted that he had not spoken.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM APTHORP.

THE next morning Lenox Dare was out in the orchard. It was a grand old place, stocked with the finest fruit-trees in the county, and spreading for acres over a broad, southern slope of hill.

Lenox had loved the old orchard from the time when she first came to Briarswild. Her favorite resort here was a corner close to the stone wall, under an ancient tree, whose branches stretched a wide, green roof over her, and dipped their burdens of ripened fruit into the deep grass. There was a long, low bench here, on which the girl could lie, and gaze down the slow incline of the land. She could see the long vistas of mossy trunks, the play of shadows, the witchcraft of sunlight. It was one of those places that would have been certain to fascinate a painter if he could have come some summer morning and sat down by Lenox Dare in the shadow of the old tree that had whitened with the blossoms of a hundred Mays.

But this morning, the girl, stretched at full length on the low bench, had no glance to spare for the long, green vistas that stretched away into the depths of the orchard. She did not know that the light and shadows were making the loveliest tapes-

tries around her. The robins sang, the insects hummed, the leaves twinkled overhead; but, absorbed in a book, all these were lost on Lenox Dare.

The air had cooled during the night, and a light breeze was stirring in the tops of the branches. The girl, in the shadows of the great tree, read on. Through the still, brooding, midsummer morning, there came no whisper to her that she had reached a great turning-point in her destiny. An hour was striking now which she could not hear, but which told the watching Fates that she had reached the "turning of the roads."

"There is a gentleman in the parlor who asked to see you, ma'am."

Lenox looked up from her book, and saw the girl standing there, who, after searching the house over, had come to the orchard in quest of her.

It was anything but agreeable tidings. There was not a man in the world whom Lenox regarded worth leaving her book for, at that particular moment. It was dreadfully exasperating, she thought. Why had he appeared just as she had reached the thrilling climax of her story!

"Who is he? What does the creature want?" she asked, in a vexed tone, as she scrambled off from the bench and shook out her rumpled dress.

The girl could give her no information, as she was herself freshly imported from a neighboring county, and had been only a week at Briarswild. Mrs. Mavis and Ben were away for the morning. Lenox had no choice but to go.

The walk from the orchard to the house gradually restored the girl's good humor. As she mounted the steps of the side piazza she took off her shade hat, and half her hair, carelessly gathered at the back, tumbled after it. She swept the dark gleaming cloud behind her ears, not dreaming what a background it made for the delicate, girlish face. The heat had brought a glow into her cheeks that usually lacked the bloom of their age. She wore a white dress — she remembers it to this day — and partly because she loved color, and partly for girlish caprice, she had tied a bright scarlet scarf around her waist that morning.

As Lenox crossed the parlor threshold she saw a stranger standing by the window. He turned as she entered. He was a slender man, a little above medium height, with striking, delicate features. He was probably a little past fifty. His beard was white, and his dark hair was deeply threaded with gray. His complexion was sallow, like that of one who had been ill, or dwelt long in southern latitudes. The eyes, under well-arched brows, were of a bright, piercing gray. He wore a dark travelling suit. One would have seen at the first glance that he was a gentleman.

Lenox stood still a moment, in mute surprise. The stranger was silent, too ; but the piercing gray eyes devoured the girlish figure on the threshold. What an eager, riveted look it was ! It seemed for a moment to absorb the man's whole soul — to take away the power or the will to speak. One might fancy he would have looked like that had some ghost stood in the door-way.

Lenox was naturally shy with strangers. Her cheeks grew scarlet under that breathless stare. She felt a strange thrill of uneasiness, as though the air about her was burdened with some mystery. Involuntarily she moved forward a step, and grasping her shade hat a little nervously with both hands, said : "I was told you asked for Lenox Dare."

The stranger seemed to listen a moment before he spoke. One might fancy again, something in the voice struck him as an old, familiar sound.

Then he moved forward a step, and spoke. His voice was usually clear and pleasant, but just now it was husky and broken.

"Yes ; I asked for Lenox Dare, and Evelyn Apthorp seems to stand before me !"

"That was my mother's name !" cried Lenox, forgetting everything else now. "Oh, sir, did you know her ?"

"My child, did you ever hear of Tom Apthorp ?" And as he asked this the stranger drew nearer.

"He was my mother's brother," Lenox answered. "He went to India, and died there, before I can remember."

"No, he did not die there, as you have been told. My child *I* am your mother's brother, Tom Apthorp !"

For a moment the room whirled about Lenox. She grew very pale. Then she gave a long, gasping cry, half of pain and half of joy. A new feeling awoke in her soul. A mysterious tie drew her mightily toward this man.

And he — his arms were around her the next mo-

ment — he was kissing her, while the tears shone in his eyes, on his glimmering beard ; he was calling her his darling, the daughter of his long-lost Evelyn !

Three hours later Mrs. Mavis and Ben returned. No words can depict their amazement when Lenox met them at the door, her face transfigured with happiness, leaning on the arm of the distinguished-looking stranger, whom she introduced as Uncle Tom, her mother's brother — not risen from the dead, but come from the Indies, after more than twenty years' absence.

Tom Apthorp had been an only son, a handsome, promising youth, a good deal spoiled by his parents. He had barely got through college when his father died, and Tom, not coming into possession of a fortune, as he anticipated, went into business. Ten years later, he suddenly sold out his interest in the house where he had been the youngest partner, and went to Calcutta, where he entered the India trade.

Young Apthorp was a little over thirty at that time, and his sister Evelyn, his only living relative, a good many years his junior, had just married her brother's old classmate.

Tom had left his native land a disappointed and rather embittered man. The woman whom he loved had failed him at the last, sacrificing herself to the ambitions of her family, and wedding a richer suitor. Tom felt, with good reason, that the older members of his firm had not sufficiently regarded his interests, and he made up his mind to "burn his ships behind him, and challenge his Fate in a foreign land."

In less than five years Tom Apthorp heard of his

sister's death, and a little later of his brother-in-law's. Evelyn's loss was a great blow to him; he had been extremely fond of her. Young Dare, too, had been more to him than any other man in the world. With their deaths he lost all inclination for a speedy visit to his native shores. He meant to return sometime, of course, and see Evelyn's little orphan daughter — his only living relative — but there was always some good reason why he should postpone the long journey to a more favorable time. His business held him. The years slipped rapidly away. The indolence, superinduced by the climate and luxurious habits, grew on him. He became ambitious to build up a great fortune; not that he was avaricious — he was too generous and kindly-souled to be that — but the pursuit of wealth had its fascinations for him.

Meanwhile, he had no idea of the condition of his orphan niece. Had he known the real state of affairs Tom Apthorp would have hastened to the ends of the earth to find her. But he had the impression that the child was tenderly sheltered in the home of her father's relatives. He knew she had gone to these when her parents died. It never crossed the man's mind that Evelyn's orphan daughter might need his care or his money. He took for granted that the child had inherited a comfortable fortune from her father. He contented himself with writing home several times, but his letters went wrong. For more than half a score of years Tom Apthorp had said to himself, "I must get off to America next year, and hunt up my poor Evelyn's little girl!"

At last one of the fevers of the climate seized him — brought him to the borders of the grave. In the slow, weary convalescence which followed, the scenes and faces of his boyhood and youth rose, fresh and vivid, as though they belonged to yesterday ; and the face that came oftenest, and lingered longest, was that of the beautiful, dead sister, who had been the idol of Tom Apthorp's youth.

He was a boy again — this man whose prime of life was slipping from him in that gorgeous, luxurious life of the Indies ; he was in the happy old home, in the pleasant New England town ; he was chasing Evelyn's bright face through the old rooms ; he heard once more the ring of her joyous laughter ; he was walking with her in the old, tree-shaded garden, while she bloomed into lovely maidenhood, and he was telling her stories of his college life, and she was listening in eager sympathy to the hopes and dreams of his opening manhood.

Tom Apthorp realized for the first time in his life that he was a lonely man. His fortune, his many friends — for he was extremely popular in the foreign society of Calcutta — could not disguise that fact.

In this mood, his thoughts naturally reverted to the orphan child of his dead sister ; that young girl, the last of his race, the only kin he had on earth. He grew curious and anxious about her ; he counted up her birthdays, and found, to his amazement, that she was on the threshold of womanhood. He had always regarded her as the merest child. His long indifference to her welfare struck Tom Apthorp for the first time ; he saw that he had treated his dead Evelyn's

daughter, his solitary little kinswoman, with cruel neglect. The man's heart and conscience awoke together. In the still, tropical nights, through the slow-wearing days, he brooded over the matter, and at last he made a solemn resolution that, as soon as his health admitted of a sea voyage, he would sail for America, and see his neice.

But while the man was laying his plans in the sick-room, very serious reverses had befallen his house in the India trade. Its old name and its high credit carried it through a commercial panic which bore down many a smaller house ; but when the worst was over, Tom Apthorp saw that his dream of building up a princely fortune would never be realized. It did not seem of so much consequence now as it did in the pride and strength of a few months before. His health was a good deal broken ; his physicians insisted on change of climate and freedom from business. He was still a tolerably rich man. The settlement of his affairs detained him at the East some time after his recovery ; but he never for an instant lost sight of the purpose he had formed in his illness.

Tom Apthorp sailed first for England, where he rested only a few days before he took passage for America. He reached New York after an absence of twenty-two years. He set out almost immediately for the old home of Colonel Marvell. Here the man learned tidings which filled him with dismay. For the first time he heard the fate of his brother-in-law's fortune, of the marriage of the old man in his second childhood, and of his death a year afterward. So

Evelyn Apthorp's daughter had been thrown a penniless orphan upon the world!

Tom Apthorp set out for Cherry Hollows with feelings not to be envied. He had heard that Colonel Marvell's housekeeper had married a second time, and taken the little girl with her to the home at the toll-gate. It was easy to imagine what her lot would be in the power of a narrow-souled woman, soured by her ill-fortunes.

Tom Apthorp did not, however, reach Cherry Hollows. A few miles from the town, the man who was driving him across the country encountered an old acquaintance, a farmer, who proved to be a neighbor of the Cranes. When he learned the stranger's relation to Lenox Dare he indulged in one long, amazed stare, and then, drawing up his team as near the other's as the narrow road permitted, he began to talk in a high-keyed, rasping voice.

After a good deal of long-winded gossip, he imparted to his eager listener the story of Lenox's flight, three years before, to Briarswild. From that time, he averred, the neighbors had lost sight of her, although there was a general impression that the girl's fortunes had immensely bettered with her change of homes.

"Take the shortest road to Briarswild," shouted the traveler to the astonished driver.

Two hours later, Lenox's uncle was awaiting her in Mrs. Mavis's parlor.

Mrs. Mavis and Ben could not fail to share Lenox's joy. Her uncle's advent seemed almost as marvelous as though one had risen from the dead. At the

dinner-table, where the four assembled, and did not rise until the summer afternoon had nearly waned, they heard the story of Tom Apthorp's long residence at the Indies; of his late dangerous illness, which had awakened in him an unappeasable longing to behold the face of his orphan niece; of the resolution he had formed to seek her at once, and of the way he had carried it out in the teeth of every obstacle.

While they all listened, in breathless silence, to this story, Mrs. Mavis and Ben watched the play of the stranger's features. Some swiftly vanishing expression would remind them of Lenox. The family look was there — not always apparent, but coming to the surface with certain expressions, and in moments of deepest feeling.

The stranger's advent at the Mavis farm had all the charm and mystery of romance, not only to his young, impressible kinswoman, but to the more practical nature of the woman who had mothered her, of the youth who was in secret her lover.

The man's presence, too, was an element of fresh life and pleasure in the household. He was familiar with the world; he had a wonderful facility of making himself at home in any society where he was thrown. He always impressed strangers as no ordinary man. But perhaps nothing charmed his present audience quite so much as the stories he related of his life in the East, of that mysterious Asiatic world, out of which he had so lately come. There were times when his fascinated hearers seemed almost to catch the hum of thronging cities, to see the spacious

streets, along which the natives glided in their loose-flowing, picturesque robes, and with their stealthy, eastern tread.

It was no wonder he charmed his small audience. Tom Apthorp had, in the highest circles, a reputation for his conversational gifts—for his powers of vivid, pictorial description.

The man, in his turn, was charmed with that restful home life among the hills. He was a good deal world-wearied and shaken in health. In some moods it seemed to him that he would be content to stay forever in this soft-lined home nest, and pass the rest of his days in dreaming indolence, like the mariners who came to anchor on the golden shores of the Lotus-land.

But the lightest heart at Briarswild was, at this time, the youngest one. The tie of kindred was like a new, priceless treasure in Lenox's life. Had not the heart of her childhood gone famished for lack of this family love, that had come to her at last from the ends of the earth? The girl seemed to tread on air in these days!

Mrs. Mavis told Ben it was a real pleasure to hear Lenox say "Uncle Tom." The very name seemed to acquire some new, beautiful meaning on her lips. Then, with what kindling eyes, what tender, absorbed attention she hung upon his words—his very looks, even!

If Lenox had felt any shyness at the beginning, it soon vanished under the perfect kindliness of her uncle's manner. In his own ways he drew out the fresh, young soul; he gauged its capacities, he discerned its possibilities.

And Lenox frolicked and sparkled about her uncle as though she had known him all her life ; she plied him with eager questions, whose simplicity amused, and whose acuteness surprised him.

To the two who watched the uncle and niece day by day, there was no doubt that Tom Apthorp soon grew immensely fond of the girl. He did not like to have her out of his sight, unless it might be when he desired to have a private talk with Mrs. Mavis or Ben, regarding her past. For, painful as the subject evidently was to him, he was still resolved to know all the facts of Lenox's history ; and he drew from Mrs. Mavis a full recital of the way in which she first came to them. His remorse over that pitiful tale was so great that the tender-hearted woman tried to comfort him.

"Don't attempt to excuse me, Mrs. Mavis," he burst out in the middle of her speech. "I have acted like a monster ! I can only say I had no idea what I was doing, or failing to do, all this time."

The man's gratitude to Mrs. Mavis and her son was inexpressible. Had it not been for them he might have come too late, and found Lenox done to death by the slow torture of the factory, or an out-cast—he dared not finish the thought. But sometimes the girl, looking suddenly up in his face, would find the piercing gray eyes bent on her with an expression she could not fathom. It was partly grief and partly tenderness. What could Uncle Tom be thinking about ? she wondered ; and she would go up to him and clasp her hands on his shoulder in a way that made him think of a dove's soft wings nestling there.

“Uncle Tom” was at this time having thoughts and plans about Lenox which would have startled her immensely, had she in the least suspected them. She had become in these few days the central interest of the man’s life — the object about which his affections and ambitions would in future revolve. He spent hours by himself in devising a brilliant programme for her future. He resolved that she should lose no opportunity for developing every gift and grace with which nature had endowed her. She should see the world, he said to himself. She should have every advantage which the best culture and the widest travel could afford her. The man congratulated himself that he had sufficient means to carry out all these projects, though he had missed the princely fortune which had been his dream for years. No doubt remorse for his previous neglect had a powerful influence in shaping Tom Apthorp’s plans for the future of the neice who had first dawned on him a great surprise, and who had soon become the priceless treasure of his heart.

The consciousness that he had failed her through so many critical years, must always rankle in the breast of the proud man. But he found some consolation in reflecting that it was not too late to make up for the past. Lenox’s future was all before her. Under his fostering care that young mind and heart should unfold into gracious womanhood. He saw, too — this critical man of the world, used to the society of fascinating women, of all lands — the slow-dawning promise of Lenox’s beauty.

“The splendid-eyed, graceful-limbed creature!” he

said to himself. "What a beauty she is going to make one of these days! It is the sort of flower that comes late to its perfect blossoming—it will be all the finer for that!"

Two weeks from the day on which Tom Apthorp came to Briarswild he went with Lenox to walk in the orchard. She had taken him, frequently accompanied by Ben Mavis, to most of her favorite haunts; but this afternoon the two were alone together. The uncle had something to say to his niece; he had been waiting for a fitting time. It seemed to have come now.

They reached the ancient apple-tree, by the low stone wall. All the way from the house Lenox had been talking and sparkling by the man's side.

"This is my favorite corner of the old orchard," she said. "I was here with a book the morning you came. I had just reached the fascinating climax of my story; and I was dreadfully vexed when the girl brought me a message from the house. I have hardly glanced inside a book since you came, Uncle Tom!" and she glanced up, half tenderly, half-archly, in his face.

He looked down fondly on the beautifully-shaped head, with its crown of darkly-bright hair, just above his shoulder.

"So I spoiled your book that day, did I, Lenox? I've spoiled other books since. My dear, uncles are dreadfully tiresome old fellows! You will find that out before long."

While he said this they had seated themselves on the low bench, among the cool, wavering shadows.

“You precious Uncle Tom!” exclaimed Lenox, and with a sudden impulse of the young heart, that overflowed toward him with love, and pride, and joy, she clasped her arms about his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, “You are worth all the books in the world!”

He understood just how great a compliment that was. Few things about Lenox had more surprised her uncle than the extent and character of her reading.

But his look was very grave, as he answered: “My poor child you have little cause to say that!” Then, before she could reply, he continued, “During these days I have been revolving some thoughts and plans, about which I would not speak until they were quite clear to me. They concern you, Lenox—they involve all your future!”

She looked startled, for the words were sufficiently impressive, and the tone made them solemn. I cannot here repeat Tom Apthorp’s words; I can only relate their substance, as Lenox did, long afterward. At that time he laid before the astonished girl the plans which he had so lately formed for her. What offers he made, what glowing pictures he painted for her future! He would take her abroad with him; he would show her the world; she should see its great cities, its grand cathedrals, its stately palaces. They would visit the most famous picture-galleries, the sublimest and loveliest scenery, the points of richest historical association in northern and southern Europe. She should have the best masters in the languages; she should meet the best people of every

land they visited. His long residence in the East had given him a world-wide acquaintance, and he had friends and influence that would give them access to any society.

They would travel slowly, so as to gather the bloom of things wherever they sojourned. He had wealth enough to indulge any reasonable desire that either might form. There was no need of being in a hurry; Lenox was young, and life was before her. He told her, too, in few words, but all the stronger for their brevity, how he would watch over her young life, how he would shield it from every harm, how her comfort and happiness should be the supreme care of his life.

And all the time he was talking the leaves of the great apple-tree quivered overhead, and flakes of sunlight mottled the shadows at their feet.

I suppose no young girl, standing where Lenox Dare did, just on the threshold of womanhood, could have listened unmoved to such words—to such promises as were uttered in the ancient orchard, that summer afternoon.

Lenox had sat quite still, her lips parted, her breath hovering on them, but, as her uncle went on her soul thrilled, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed with joyful anticipation. What a future opened before her! How eager she was to go out and meet it—to see the pride and splendor, the beauty and glory of the world!

She was about to speak when she started suddenly, the light which had kindled in her face went down; a shadow crept into her eyes.

“But, Uncle Tom, must I leave Mrs. Mavis and Ben?” she asked.

“I suppose there would be no help for that, Lenox. They could hardly go with us. But I give you my word that you shall come back and see them, whenever you desire.”

Lenox sat quite still after he had spoken. Her thoughts had suddenly gone away from that hour to another—it was the night when she first came to Briarswild. Again she stood at the gate, with breath panting, with whirling brain, with shaking limbs. Again she watched with longing eyes the light as it shone out from the hall, and showed her Ben Mavis’s figure, as he stood there and gazed up at the gray clouds of the summer night. Again she heard his first words of dismay as he recognized her—his swift, pitying welcome that followed. Again she saw his mother’s tender face as it first bent over her. Again she felt the touch of the soft arms as they closed about her.

Lenox had, in answer to her uncle’s questions, fully described to him her life at Cherry Hollows, but she had always avoided any allusion to her last days at the toll-gate, or to her flight from it.

The whole subject was so distressing that she dreaded, for her uncle’s sake, to approach it, while for her own she feared to recall that time. But Lenox felt assured that Mrs. Mavis had related all the circumstances of her first appearance at Briarswild. This conviction was only strengthened by the fact that, in all their talks together, her uncle maintained an absolute silence regarding the most momentous event of her life.

He, too, had been silent, watching for some time the delicate, half-averted face over which the shadows of the apple-leaves flickered. At last he leaned forward.

“What are you thinking about, Lenox?” he asked.

She turned, and faced him with steady eyes. The flush in her cheeks had paled. What a resolute line had come about her mouth! This was a side of Lenox her uncle had never seen before.

“If I were to go away, Mrs. Mavis and Ben would miss me,” she said. “I know them. It would grieve their hearts.”

“But, Lenox,” said her uncle, in the kindly, reasoning tone with which one might answer the rash, generous impulse of a child, “do you expect to stay here always? Do you mean to give up all your life to these people?”

His question went to the quick with her. All that “these people” had been to her, all that she owed them, rose in a moment to Lenox Dare. An instant later she stood, with her pale face and her kindling eyes, before her uncle. At that moment she would have reminded one of the way she looked when Guy Fosdick came up to meet her in the moonlight, on the beach.

“I remember what I was when I came to them,” she said, and her low, shaken voice grew clearer and steadier as she went on. “I was a lonely, desolate, broken-hearted orphan girl. In all the world I had no friend to succor me, no roof to shelter me; I had fled from a life that was more terrible than death. And they” — there was a little pause, a sob in her

throat, but she mastered it — “they took me at once into their home, into their hearts. They showed me what a mother’s love could mean, what a brother’s care could be! Think what they have done for me in all these years! Think where, had it not been for them, you might have come at last to find me! Oh, Uncle Tom, I was your dead sister’s orphan girl, the last of your kin, and you forgot me! You left me to the cold charity, to the harshness and cruelty of strangers. You knew what the world could be to such as I left all alone in it! If you had come sooner, Uncle Tom, I would have gone with you to the ends of the earth, but you have found me too late. I thank you, from my heart, for all your splendid offers, but if you gave me the whole world I could not take it now — I could not go away from Mrs. Mavis and Ben!”

There were times when Lenox Dare’s face had the look of her mother. This was one of them. She had scarcely known what she said. In the midst of the awful memories, and the passion of gratitude which possessed her, her words had been like a cry forced from her heart to her lips. In her moments of strongest feeling there was a grand power in this young girl. We have seen the effect it had on Guy Fosdick; how it had penetrated through all his pride and self-conceit, to some courage and manliness at bottom; how it had made him cast to the winds the beliefs and ambitions of a life, and worked a change in him that was almost a miracle.

Lenox’s power, at these rare moments, was due, partly, to the intensity of the feelings and convictions

which mastered her. Her pale, young face, her solemn tones, made her seem almost like a sorrowful, accusing angel.

But Tom Apthorp felt at that moment as though his dead sister stood before him. He saw her eyes, he heard her reproachful tones in her child's. His lips trembled; he was a proud man, he covered his face with his hands.

The next moment Lenox's arms were around his neck.

"Oh, uncle, what have I said! I didn't mean to accuse *you*!" she exclaimed.

In a moment he lifted his head. His keen, gray eyes gazed at her with a tenderness, touched with remorse, that hurt her.

"Don't reproach yourself, my child!" he said. "You have only spoken the truth."

"I had no right to say what I did, Uncle Tom. It seemed to come of itself."

"I know that, my child. Do you suppose my conscience has not said all you did to me? Do you suppose that the consciousness of my long failure toward you will not rankle to my latest hour?"

She looked shocked at that. She would have tried to comfort him; but he was not the sort of man to make that easy. While she sat quite silent, he rose, bent down, kissed her forehead tenderly, and then, without speaking a word, he went away and left her in the summer afternoon, under the shadows of the old apple tree.

Those who knew Tom Apthorp were aware that he seldom gave up a matter on which he had set his

heart. He made, in his niece's hearing, no further allusion to the plans he had formed for her future, but he did not in the least relinquish them. He was perhaps more bent on carrying them out, after their talk in the orchard. So far as possible, he told himself, he would make up for his failure in the past. He would prove to his niece, to himself, that he had not come too late to make her womanhood something gladder and richer than it could ever have been without him. This became the fixed determination, the central passion of the man. As he revolved his plans, he saw the important aid that Mrs. Mavis and her son could render him at this crisis. If he took them into his confidence, if he once secured their influence on his side, he did not doubt that Lenox could, in the end, be prevailed on to yield to his wishes. He felt confident, too, that he could set these in such a light — he could show so clearly their bearing on his niece's future — that her friends would give their consent to the separation, whatever pain it might cost them. He made up his mind to broach the subject first to young Mavis.

Lenox's uncle had expressed much pleasure at the perfect way in which she managed her horse. This was largely due, as we have seen, to young Mavis's training. When the elder man learned the share Dainty had borne in his niece's fortunes, he never let a day go by without visiting the stall, where the creature soon learned to recognize his step, almost as quickly as she did that of her young mistress.

Late one afternoon, Ben Mavis, alighting from his horse at the stable door, met Lenox's uncle. They

went up toward the house together. As they reached the gate which opened from the large garden into the back yard Mr. Apthorp touched Ben's arm.

"Let us go back," he said. "I want to have a private talk with you."

It was singular that young Mavis felt, at that moment, a secret reluctance to turning back, as though something disagreeable awaited him; but he could not refuse the other's request. The path, heavily bordered on either side with currant and raspberry bushes, stretched long and straight before them. The sun was going down over the distant hills. To this day Ben remembers that flock of orange-clouds rimmed with flame, and that he braced himself, as a man might who expects a blow.

Young Mavis had, from the first, an instinct that the appearance of Lenox's uncle boded him no good. He had tried to rid himself of this feeling. The two men had been thrown a great deal together, and Ben had yielded to the charm of the elder man's society. Lenox's uncle had the most cordial liking for the young fellow, apart from any grateful sense of all he owed to him.

Ben Mavis was such a manly, generous-hearted fellow; he had such keen humor, with such sturdy good sense, that it was impossible not to feel drawn toward him. Yet, if Tom Apthorp had had the faintest idea to what test he was about to put that brave, young soul, he would not have talked as he did in the shadowy, fruit-scented old garden. The elder man linked his arm in the younger's.

"My dear young Mavis," he began, "I am going

to take you into my confidence — to tell you of a plan on which I have set my heart, but which I shall never attempt to carry out unless I have your assent — the promise, indeed, of your hearty co-operation.”

“I shall be glad to serve you, Mr. Apthorp,” answered Ben, looking at the man with his clear, honest eyes. “But I am wholly in the dark as to your meaning.”

In the next half hour Ben knew. When he first caught sight of the other’s drift, his heart gave a single bound, and then sank like lead. The elder had all the talking to himself. He laid open his whole plans regarding his niece; he showed their immense importance to all her future; he related the scene which had occurred three days before in the orchard, and he concluded: “My dear fellow, you see now I am at a standstill. I shall never move another step in this matter unless you consent to help me. It would be hopeless for me to attempt to shake Lenox’s determination not to leave you. Indeed, I have neither the heart nor the will to do that. I would not, if I could, take her away without your consent, and your mother’s. You have a far higher right in her than any I can lay claim to. What is our tie of kindred but a perpetual reproach to me!” And he spoke now with exceeding bitterness, and ground his heel into the gravel.

Ben looked off at the sun hanging just above the pines, on the crest of the distant hill. It seemed as though a cold shudder had passed over all the pleasant landscape. He could not at once bring himself to reflect on the consequences of what Mr. Apthorp pro-

posed. What would the days be — what the home — the world itself, if Lenox were to go away from them?

But he put that thought away, with a kind of blind instinct that he must conceal his real feeling from this man, and he answered almost at random: "It will hurt my mother cruelly to part with Lenox."

"I am certain of that, Ben," answered Mr. Apthorp. "I have gone over the whole ground many times. That explains my coming to you now. You know your influence over your mother — her faith in your judgment. If you were first to broach the subject, if you brought her to look at the matter in the light of its advantages to Lenox, you might prevail upon her to consent to a temporary separation."

Ben was silent. He knew his mother's heart.

"You see how the matter stands now, my dear fellow," Mr. Apthorp continued in a moment or two. "I leave it entirely in your hands. Lenox's fate rests now with you. I give you my word I shall never attempt to take her from Briarswild without your hearty co-operation."

At that moment the supper-bell rang. It was a relief to Ben.

"Give me a little time to think this over, Mr. Apthorp," he said, and the two men turned and went up to the house together.

The night which followed dragged its slow, wakeful hours over young Mavis. Through all the long watches those words of Lenox's uncle kept repeating themselves, like the endless ticking of a clock, like the regular fall of waves on a beach — "Her fate rests in your hands!"

Could he let her go out of his life, he asked himself, just as he had learned she was the center of all its hopes and joys! What would the mornings be without the sound of her voice — what the long days — what the drearier evenings? For he loved Lenox Dare — this brave young fellow — with all the pure passion and all the loyal strength of his young manhood. And it was the heart of the lover which spoke now, which pleaded for its dearest life.

But the heart of the lover could not warp the native good sense of the man. Ben saw perfectly all the benefit Lenox would derive from going abroad with her uncle. The time had come when it would be vastly for her interest to leave Briarswild.

Ben's love made him, at this time, keen to forecast the future. He was honest enough, generous enough, too, to admit all that side of Lenox's nature which was unlike his own. If she went out into the world, if she enjoyed all its finest opportunities for culture, if she saw its choicest society, if she met its grand men — men of noble intellect and polished manners — would not she, so keenly alive to all goodness and beauty, be impressed and charmed? Would not her standards change, her tastes become exacting? Would not he suffer by the contrast — he, a very commonplace fellow at best, brought up in a backwoods town?

But here the pride, the sturdy self-respect of the young fellow, made itself felt through the lover's jealous fears. Was he fallen so low as that? he asked. Could he bring himself to hold back the woman of his love from the best and highest, because, seeing

these for herself, he feared she might not choose him above all men? Would not Lenox's presence at Briarswild be hereafter a thing not to be borne — a perpetual reminder of his selfishness?

So his passion and his pride pleaded alternately. So they pleaded for days and nights that followed. And all the time Mr. Apthorp's speech about Lenox's fate resting in his hands, haunted the air and saddened the summer days. He was so grave that Lenox rallied him at times on his seriousness; and his mother, looking at him with puzzled eyes, would ask: "What has got into you, Ben?"

Then he would rouse himself, and be witty and gay, as they had hardly ever known him. Nobody suspected the struggle that was going on in the brave young soul.

Tom Apthorp, man of the world, reader of men as he was, was as thoroughly deceived as the others. He would, no doubt, have desired a more ambitious marriage for his niece; but had he seen that the young people were sincerely attached to each other, he would not have opposed their union. In his remorse, he would have told himself that justice demanded of his pride this penalty for his long neglect. He saw, too, that young Mavis was no common man. He had already, in a way, grown fond of him.

Lenox's uncle was, however, gratified that matters stood as they did between the young people. He knew that Lenox's frank, grateful affection for Ben Mavis was not that of a maiden for her lover.

Several days passed — the hardest that had ever

fallen into the young man's smooth, prosperous life. Yet one who knew him thoroughly would have had little doubt of the decision to which he would come at last.

One afternoon, when Mr. Apthorp and his niece had gone out for a drive, Ben Mavis went into his mother's room. To this day, neither could tell how Ben first introduced the subject of Lenox's going abroad. But the young man remembered for years his mother's look when the first inkling of his drift broke on her.

"O, Ben, Ben," she cried out, sharply, "do you mean to say that the man wants to take our little girl away from us — that he has dared to speak of such a thing!"

"But, mother," answered Ben, "you are a reasonable woman. If her uncle can do for Lenox something that we never can — something that will make all her future life larger and happier — ought we to stand in the way? Ought we to keep her here?"

"What can he do for Lenox Dare that we cannot do as well, or better?" asked Mrs. Mavis, in a half-vexed, half-defiant voice, very unlike her usual chirrupy one.

Then Ben related the interview in the garden. He dwelt on the splendid opportunities which had been offered to Lenox, and which, if she persisted in refusing them, would be a matter of life-long regret to her. He showed his mother that the responsibility of the girl's fate rested with them alone. The poor fellow pleaded the more earnestly because his heart was not in the matter.

Mrs. Mavis was not convinced in a single talk ; but Ben's arguments had their weight. Other talks followed. Taught by sharp experience, the young man said to himself: "The worst will be in making up her mind to it."

One day, after dinner, Mr. Apthorp sat reading his paper on the piazza, when young Mavis came out to him and said: "I have done what I could. My mother has promised me nothing. But she will listen now to anything you may choose to say."

Mr. Apthorp acted at once on Ben's suggestion. He and Mrs. Mavis had a long, private talk that afternoon. Other talks followed. The result was easy to foresee. Nobody could question the immense advantage which Lenox would derive from the plans which Mr. Apthorp so adroitly laid before his hostess. He fervently repeated his assurance that he should never move in the matter he had so much at heart unless her friends promised him their entire co-operation. Their claims, as his niece had told him in the orchard, were supreme.

"Claims!" he repeated, in a bitter tone. "What of those had he to make in the face of his long failure toward the girl?"

Mr. Apthorp gained his point. Mrs. Mavis gave her consent to the separation. From that moment, as Ben had foreseen, the worst was over; and her generous soul found a real satisfaction in contemplating the grand future that lay before Lenox.

All this time the young girl had no idea that her fate was hanging in the balance. The talk in the orchard had never again been alluded to by either her-

self or her uncle. She never for a moment regretted her decision. But her uncle's magnificent offer could not fail to dazzle her imagination. It was impossible for her not to dwell sometimes on all she had put away from her that summer afternoon.

The time came to speak, at last. Mrs. Mavis opened the subject; but Ben was there to second her arguments. In requesting his presence, at this juncture, Mrs. Mavis had no idea of the cruel pain to which she was subjecting the brave fellow. Had she known the truth, she would have plunged her right hand in the fire sooner than allow Lenox Dare to leave Briars-wild.

When Mrs. Mavis first spoke, Lenox started, and looked wildly from mother to son.

"Has Uncle Tom told you anything?" she burst out.

"Everything, Lenox," answered Mrs. Mavis. "We know all about the plans he has formed for you — all about your talk in the orchard!"

"And are you willing to have me go away from you?" she asked, with surprise and reproach in her voice.

It was Ben's turn to speak now. He rose and stood before her.

"Lenox," he said, and his voice was steady, and his eyes, calm and searching, looked in her face, "if my mother and I were quite out of the question — if we were out of the world, for instance — what would you say to this grand offer of your uncle's?"

There was a pause. He saw the sudden light that

flashed in her eyes. Mrs. Mavis saw it, too. Lenox had answered before she had spoken.

“But you *are* in the world! You are the dearest friends I have in it. I will not leave you for anything it can offer me!”

But her look before her words had settled Ben's last doubt. In the talk that followed, he fully sustained his mother. He sometimes took the words from her lips, and set her arguments before Lenox in his calmer man's fashion.

Here, again, the end could easily be foreseen. When the talk was finished, Ben, by a pre-arranged signal, summoned Mr. Apthorp to the conference. As he entered the room, Lenox went up to him; her cheeks were flushed, the tears were in her eyes; but a great light shone through them. She laid her hands on his shoulder.

“Uncle Tom,” she said, “they will have it so. I am going to Europe with you!”

A fortnight of hurried preparations followed. Lenox was very busy, and for the most part very happy, in these days. She made farewell visits to all the old haunts, with her uncle or Ben Mavis — sometimes with both of them.

But the days that went swifter than a weaver's shuttle to all the others dragged slowly to the young man. Now that the wrench must come, he longed to have it over. He laid a terrible task upon heart and soul at this time; but he bore himself so that neither the mother, who idolized him, or the keen-sighted man who spent hours every day in his society, dreamed of what lay at the heart of things for Ben Mavis.

The four went to New York together. It was in early September. They spent a week seeing whatever was worth seeing in the great city; then Mr. Apthorp and his niece sailed for Europe.

Mrs. Mavis and Ben went to the steamer with them. That was the last of the young man's long, cruel test. Lenox clung, sobbing, to Mrs. Mavis, at the last moment.

"I shall come back in a year," she said.

Ben doubted that. So did Mr. Apthorp. But the man had solemnly promised that whenever her friends summoned her, Lenox should take the next steamer for America.

The mother and son watched from the pier the great vessel, as she passed slowly out of sight. Lenox stood on the deck by her uncle's side, and waved her last farewells to them.

You and I, reader, will stand also, for a moment, and watch her—the little girl whom we met first at Cherry Hollows' Glen. How like a fairy-tale the changed fortunes seem! Beyond those blue, dancing waves the old world awaits her. She will see all its glorious treasures, its grandest and loveliest scenes. The wisest care will enwrap her life, the most doting love will encircle her wherever she moves. No wonder her young soul, amid all its grief at parting, leaps at the thought of the land she goes to, while her native shores fade dim and gray in the distance.

And with the great steamer, Lenox Dare fades for awhile from our view. Her life has passed now

beyond the "turning of the roads." When we meet her again she will know what the years and the world have taught her—she will be, with God's grace, what the years and the world have made her.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE LIBRARY.

ROBERT BERESFORD sat writing in his library. On his left the oriel-window was open, and outside the May morning shone amid its fresh-leaved green—its fragrant bloom. It must have been such a morning when Lancelot “returned among the flowers” with Guinevere, and King Arthur led her to their ill-starred bridal, while

“All the world was white with May.”

Some fancies of this sort had flashed across the mind of the occupant of the library, as he stood, for a few minutes, watching the light and shade—the vivid green, the pink and white bloom, before he turned from the window and buried himself in a heap of business letters that awaited him on the table. He smiled a little as he sat down, thinking about his next hour’s work, and how wide of that mark went any romancing about May mornings and mythic bridals; but he was soon as deeply engrossed with his writing as though Robert Beresford were, at bottom, neither artist nor poet.

It was now more than eight years since, in that very room, he had faced the great question of his life, and made the choice which determined his

future. The room itself had, in these years, undergone a greater change than its occupant. It had quite lost its character of an artist's studio, although some of the old pictures, and some precious studies in oils and water-colors, still held their places on the walls. But there was little now in the cool, gray tones of the room, in the carved bookcases, the heavy writing-table and the handsome furnishings, to suggest the old picturesque effects of light and shade, and masses of gorgeous color. The artist's studio had disappeared in the modern library. Its mistress, however, still persisted in calling it a studio. The name had, to her husband, a half-pleasant, half-patetic association. It was linked with the dearest hopes and aspirations of his youth. His wife's instinct had failed her in one instance. During all these years Stacey never suspected what a price her husband had paid for the ease and luxury in which her life was nested.

Robert Beresford had done his work steadily, manfully. He had come to be regarded as the inspiring brain of his special department of the great iron firm. He devoted to it all his best hours, his clearest thoughts, his strongest energies. Other prizes may have awaited him in totally different fields; but this work had its satisfactions, ample enough to make him wonder over them, to often question whether they would not have been less had nature originally intended him for an artist.

Josiah Wentworth — the head partner, on whom these last years had been telling heavily — never ceased to secretly plume himself on his “snapping

up young Beresford in the nick of time — making a capital business-man out of what would have been wasted in life-long dawdling over his pictures.”

Robert Beresford had entered into business at a time when mind and habits were elastic enough to take some new bent from the influences about him. In certain directions the new sphere had proved a great training-school for mind and heart. He was beginning to realize this himself, as the years lengthened their perspective behind him. Partner in the great house whose vast industries and wide relations made it a power in the business world, he was brought in contact with all varieties of human nature. He learned much which it is well for a man to know, but which no studio can ever teach him.

The firm owned large mining districts in the western part of Pennsylvania. Hundreds of workmen were employed in the mines and at the foundries. The majority were rough, ignorant, more or less brutal, their passions easily roused into a frenzy of rage and hatred. There were crises when it was no easy matter to deal with such characters. Those in authority had to be on the alert for the first signs of mutiny, for riots in the mines, and rebellion in the workshops.

It was not long before the senior members of the firm discovered that young Beresford had a wonderful knack in dealing with the hands. Nobody could allay a storm of rising passion, could put down the beginnings of mutiny, with the readiness, the nerve, the tact, that the youngest partner displayed. His popularity with the men was always more or less a mystery to his associates. They thought it was

largely due to his handsome presence, his grace of manner, and to a certain happy tact for managing his inferiors.

The brawny-limbed, grimy-faced workmen knew better.

“ ’Taint handsome looks, and fine manners, and ’ily words as could go down with this chap !” said one of their number, a leather-skinned, huge-fisted giant, with a beard that flamed like that of Chaucer’s Miller, as he addressed a small knot of workmen hanging around the steps of a lager-beer shop. “ But the young boss, when he’s says anything, has a way of goin’ to the quick ; he puts the heart right inter a feller ; makes him feel that ole clo’es, and rough times, and hard work needn’t keep him down in the mire, if he’s jest got the pluck to stand up and be a man !”

A deep, gruff chorus of approval followed this speech. A dozen clay pipes were waved in the summer-evening air, which was scented with vile tobacco. The red-bearded, huge-fisted workman had hit the mark, where his betters had failed.

To Robert Beresford the gangs of employees were something more than hirelings and machines. He could never lose sight of the bond of a common humanity between himself and the lowest and worst of the hands. They, too, were men, in the midst of life’s sorrows, and struggles, and bewilderments—over them, too, arched the sky of eternal hope—beneath them, too, waited the green earth, with the blessed silence and healing of the grave.

Thoughts like these made young Beresford’s strong

heart tender when he met the men in his office, among the workshops, or in the mines. It made his speech kindly, and his bearing courteous toward them, as man to brother man. And the swift, sure instincts of the hands taught them that he was their friend. They knew it—at times they secretly half resented the knowledge. For discontent and obstinacy, and all evil moods, would come to a head sometimes; and the men, spurred on by vicious ringleaders, would be on the point of breaking into open revolt. Then young Beresford had to show the disaffected and mutinous another side of himself—had to prove to them who was master.

The man who sat writing that May morning in his library, was the Robert Beresford of old. His ideals were a part of himself. In the wear and tear of life they had not grown dimmed. If the workmen had learned some things from him, they had taught him others, which he never could have learned in a finer school. He had seen what noble hearts could throb, what beautiful virtues could thrive under coarse speech and rugged faces. At the mines, in the foundries, men toiled daily, who would, if need were, have died for him.

There was a sudden rustle of woman's garments outside, and the next moment a lady stood at the side-door which opened from the library on the piazza. Something arrested her on the threshold, for she suddenly stood still, with wide, startled eyes. Against one of the panes of the oriel-window hung a little oval of stained glass; a beautiful bit of mediæval work which Robert Beresford had picked up

long ago, in some old castle on the Rhine. The light flashed through the stained glass, and fell upon the man's head, and made a glory there, of violet and gold. The soft, tremulous rays quivered among the thick locks, and seemed, to the eyes of the woman gazing there, a fitting crown for the spirited, beautiful head. This had still the grace of its youth, still, in some subtle, indescribable way, suggested Apollo and the morning.

It is a nobler face, although it looks only a little older than the one we first met in Cherry Hollows' Glen. The years have touched it with some finer expression, some added strength and manliness, but there is little other change, even in the tawny brown beard, or in the locks where that wonderful aureole is lying.

The woman, too, standing in the doorway, her eyes full of proud, tender light, is not less fair than when she stood there in her bridal loveliness. No doubt the content at her heart has had its share in keeping the light in Stacey Beresford's eyes, the youth in her face. For the married life of this pair has never suffered the sad disenchantment that so many wedded lives do. Robert Beresford is still, in his wife's eyes, all, and more than the lover of her girlhood. To him she is still the maiden of his young manhood's wooing, the one woman, sacred and set apart, to be sheltered from every harsh wind of life, by his strong arm, in his manly heart.

No doubt Stacey Beresford was dearer to her husband because of all he had sacrificed for her. It was the good fortune of the pair, too, that, thus far,

no dissimilar tastes had made, at times, a chilling sense of separateness in their lives. Stacey's grace, beauty, and wit still charmed, as they had gone far to win, the artist temperament of her husband.

The woman stood still in the doorway, and the man wrote on in the silence, and the glory of the stained glass shone like a nimbus in his hair. Stacey Beresford's thoughts were busy within her. They glanced over her married life, they went far back to the days of her young love. She thought of all the man, sitting there, had been to her, of all that was splendid and lovable in him, which his wife knew better than those who most loved and admired him. In the midst of these thoughts a new idea struck her. It came so suddenly, she seized it so eagerly, that she started a little. The man at the table caught the slight movement; he looked up, and saw his wife standing there, as she had been standing for the last two minutes.

She made a lovely vision in that doorway, as she had, years before, when the sight of her helped him to decide the most momentous question of his life. She was dressed now for a drive, and her dainty hat, and her elegant spring costume, became her exquisitely.

Before Robert Beresford could speak, his wife came up to him.

"Don't move, Robert!" she said, hastily. "That wonderful light surrounds your head like a nimbus—it crowns you like a king!"

"What in the world are you talking about, Stacey?"

"About that light from the stained glass in the window. If you could only see the rays quivering and glancing in your hair! They held me like a spell, on the threshold, when I was coming in to say good-bye, before driving off."

"How long had you been there, and I writing on, stupid and oblivious?"

"Less than two minutes, I think. Do you want to know what I thought, standing there and watching you, with that lovely aureole in your hair?"

"I shall be delighted to know."

"That the rays had found the right place — the one fitting head to crown!"

The man laughed gaily to hide some deeper feeling.

"It is lucky for the peace of other husbands that their wives would not agree with you, Stacey."

"Other husbands!" echoed the lady, half archly, half-contemptuously. "As though the crown and flower of them were to be named with you, Robert Beresford!"

"Stacey, what stuff are you talking? Crowns and aureoles indeed! It isn't safe to flatter any man in that fashion. The whole sex are vain rascals at bottom!"

The lady laughed merrily. Then she glanced at the loose pile of letters on the table. "Are you nearly through with those tiresome things, Robert?" she asked.

He read the wish that was at the bottom of the question.

"No, my dear, they will keep me steadily at work until noon, so it is hopeless for me to think of accompanying you. But you will take Phil along?"

"Oh, yes; it is his birthday, you remember; and he is half-wild at the prospect of going into Boston, and having the toy sail-boat I promised him."

"I remember my own idols at his age, and can sympathize with him. But, Stacey, the wonder with me, all the time, is, that I see you stand there, the mother of my boy, seven years old! It seems only yesterday since I brought you here," and as he said these words, Robert Beresford looked at his wife, with the look that had been in his eyes when he wooed her.

The sight brought back the thought which had struck her in the doorway.

"It is Philip's birthday," she said, speaking with sudden seriousness. "Do you know what always comes a month after that, Robert?"

"You must mean the anniversary of our marriage, Stacey?"

"Yes, and I want to choose your gift to me, this time. It flashed across me while I stood watching you just now. Will you promise to give me what I am going to ask for, Robert?"

"How serious you look, Stacey! What is that thing

'That shall not be my offer—not thy asking?'"

She drew a little nearer to his side. She laid her hand on his.

"Robert," she said, "I want you should paint me a picture for our next anniversary!"

"Paint you a picture, Stacey!" repeated the man,

and something came and went swiftly in his face. His wife could have no idea where her light words had struck. She went on: "Yes, Robert, dear. I have set my heart on this matter. No other present could have a tenth part of the value in my eyes. This, I ask for, would be a part of yourself. Then I do not want you to give up your pictures, as you have been doing all these years. The man whom I married was an artist!"

Did she see something in his eyes at that moment that made her add: "I more than half believe he would be one now if it were not for me and the boy? To think you never painted anything for me in your life, Robert!"

As she said these words, that old morning in Cherry Hollows' Glen rose up to him. He had not thought of it for years.

"I tried to paint you a picture once, Stacey, you remember, and it came to grief!"

"Oh, yes, and how much it had to do with our engagement! Robert, will you promise that I shall have the picture?"

Robert Beresford glanced toward the closet where, for ten years, his neglected easel had stood. He might have returned to it at times. He had not buried heart and soul in his business. He had wide leisures for reading and varied studies — leisures of which he made the most. But his high sense of honor had always held him sternly to the covenant he had made with the elder Wentworth. He feared lest, if he plunged into the old work, it would prove too intoxicating for him. He was a business man;

he dared not trust himself with colors and canvases.

And now it was Stacey — the woman for whose sake he had sacrificed so much — who urged him to resume the old work! It was not, however, fear of himself which made him hesitate, before he answered.

“I shall be quite busy for the next month, Stacey; I may not be able to finish anything for our anniversary.”

“No matter whether it is finished or not,” rejoined Stacey, with the air of a charming woman, accustomed to have her wishes indulged. “If you begin the picture on that day I shall be quite satisfied. Only promise that I shall have it!”

Robert Beresford looked in his wife’s eyes. Something tender and solemn in his own awed her a little, as he said: “I promise you, Stacey.”

At that moment a beautiful child, breathless with haste and eagerness, burst into the room. Chestnut curls clustered thick around the small head, and his dancing eyes had his mother’s rare violet shade.

“Papa — mamma,” he panted, “the carriage is at the door! It is time to go.”

The parents watched the little, restless figure, in its fresh suit of gray, surmounted with a bit of tasseled cap.

“Come here, and tell me where you are going, you small rogue!” said his father.

The boy came over to the man’s side. He lifted his eager, grave face to his father’s.

“It is Philip’s birthday,” he said, in his sweet, childish treble. “We are going into Boston to buy

a sail-boat, so big," and he stretched his arms to their widest.

"And what will you do with the sail-boat when you get it?" demanded his father.

"Philip is going to sail all around the world. He is going to hunt for lions in the big forests, and for camels in the gray deserts. He is going to find parrots with green wings and red spots for mamma, and a striped zebra, and a great white elephant for papa!"

The violet eyes danced. It was all real to the speaker.

"Ah, Philip," said his father, regarding the child with an expression half-serious, half-amused, "at seven every boy is a poet. I should like to see with your eyes, to believe with your faith, this blessed moment. There is a heavy balance of birthdays on my side. I wonder if that gives me any solid advantage over you!"

Philip always treated his father's philosophizing with superb indifference.

"The ponies are waiting!" he again shouted impatiently, as he scampered toward the door.

Stacey turned also, and then her husband rose, seized his cap, and followed the two!

In the drive stood a small phaeton, with a couple of ponies. They were beautiful little creatures, of dark chestnut and slender build. Beresford had given them to his wife a year ago. They stood now, with flashing eyes and arching necks, impatient to be off, yet they answered perfectly to every touch of the reins. Their mistress managed them admirably. She prided herself on being a skilled horse-woman.

Robert Beresford seated his wife and boy in the phæton, and placed the reins in her hands. Then he said: "I never do this, Stacey, without a lurking fear lest I am trusting too precious a load to these fiery little quadrupeds."

"Your fears are all moonshine, Robert!" answered the lady, lightly. "My little ponies, though they have plenty of spirit, will never run away with me. I can manage them perfectly."

"As perfectly as you can their master!" he rejoined, lifting his brows archly.

Stacey laughed her merriest. "I shall find my own time and way for revenging your cruel sarcasm, Robert. Trust a woman for that!" Then, just on the point of starting, she grew serious again. She looked at her husband with grateful eyes. "I did not thank you for your promise in the library; but you have made me the happiest woman in the world, Robert!" she said.

"Then I am paid for the picture in advance, Stacey."

With that she pulled the reins. The ponies dashed off. Robert Beresford stood and watched them as they swept out of the drive into the road. He saw his boy take off his cap, and wave it to him; he saw his wife turn back and smile on him. And Robert Beresford always remembered how his wife looked, with the glow in her cheeks, and the gladness in her eyes, as she turned back and smiled on him, before she disappeared among the light and dews of the May morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE GROUNDS.

THE man did not return at once to his library. The delicious air, the bursting loveliness drew him like a spell. He sauntered among his grounds — ancient grounds, with shady walks and far-spreading trees, which had sheltered several generations of Beresfords. Rustic seats and arbors, and green, sloping terraces, and a thousand picturesque effects of nature and art, pleased the eyes. The owner made it a point to keep the grounds and the gray stone mansion, which his father had built, in complete order. The land was dearer to him now than in the days when he would gladly, for his own part, have relinquished every rod of it for liberty to retire with his easel and brushes to some corner where he could watch in peace the dreams that haunted him, grow into life and beauty on his canvases.

But the spring morning, palpitating with fresh life all about him, and the talk in the library, had stirred some of the old dreams and visions in the man's heart and brain. Robert Beresford, as he strolled among his grounds that morning, watched with an artist's eye the glancing sunlight, the wavering leaves,

the lovely effects of light and shade about him. He looked at the solid, ample house, and his sense of the picturesque pleased itself with the oriel-window, the upper balcony, the wide piazzas, which had added so much architectural grace to the ancient simplicity.

Yet, in all these changes, the present owner had never lost sight of the original design. He liked to think: "If my father were to rise from his grave to-day, he would know the old place at a glance."

The house stood on an elevation which commanded a magnificent view of the country. The first Beresford must have had a fine eye for scenery — at least so his descendant thought, when he gazed from one point and another of his grounds, on the wide landscape below him. Ten miles eastward stood the dark huddled roofs of Boston, with the State-House dome glittering above them, and the slender church-spires piercing the blue air.

In a corner of the grounds, remotest from the house, was an outlook, which in some respects surpassed every other. Robert Beresford, without intending it, suddenly found himself at this place. It was separated by a low, thick hedge from the lane which bordered one side of the grounds.

He glanced over the broad, noble landscape. He saw Cambridge and Somerville in the distance, and ancient Medford and pleasant Arlington at hand. How fair the old towns and villages looked in the soft lights and fresh foliage of the New England May! His eyes were following the blue windings of the Mystic when he caught a slight sound, like a half-

suppressed cry, and, turning suddenly, he saw something which quite drove the landscape out of his mind.

Just inside the hedge stood a boy, who must have been years younger than Philip. He was ragged, sunbrowned, barefooted. How he came there was a mystery. He had probably climbed over some gate, or crawled through some gap in the hedge ; and the bare, dirty little feet had made no sound on the gravel walks.

The boy had no suspicion that any one was watching him. He had suddenly turned a sharp corner in the walk, and his gaze had been arrested by the sight of a great swing in front of him. He stood perfectly still, gazing at the deep, cushioned seat, his mouth wide open, his round, black eyes full of admiring wonder, his stumpy fingers locked together. Anybody with a little imagination might have fancied him a small savage before his fetich. That was what Robert Beresford thought as he stood just in the shadow of the great horsechestnut, and watched the child half a dozen yards before him.

Somebody else watched him, too. It was a man squatting on the other side of the hedge — a rather short, heavily-built man, with a ragged black beard, and shaggy brows overhanging dark, fierce eyes. He was a young man still, but his face had a hard, sullen look, which never came of an honest, well-spent youth ; his clothes were miserably shabby, and there was an air of general vagabondage about the man which would tell against him in a search for work, or a petition for alms.

He sat motionless as a figure carved in stone ; but he kept watch — intent, suspicious — on the man inside the hedge. There was an ugly gleam in the eyes, under the shaggy brows.

Robert Beresford's mood was an unusually soft one that morning. Whatever came in his way for help or pity would have been certain of double measure at that moment. Something in the child's attitude, in his rapt gaze, in his general untidiness and poverty, went to the man's heart. A look, half of pity and half of amusement, grew in his eyes. But the other, a few rods off, skulking behind the hedge, could not see that. He fancied the face, half turned from him, was growing hard and wrathful, and that the owner of the grounds was only deliberating how best to visit his anger on the child who had ventured inside his premises.

Robert Beresford moved stealthily forward ; he drew close to the boy. An amused smile played under his mustache.

But the man, behind the hedge, could not see that. It did not take him long to make up his mind regarding the singular behavior of the owner of the grounds. It was clear enough that he meant to seize the child and give him a terrible beating. At that thought, the blood surged into the dark cheeks. There was a wolfish gleam in the fierce eyes.

In the grass, just within the man's reach, lay a heavy club. He stealthily stretched out his hand, and drew the weapon toward him. In moments of rage, that muscular frame had the strength of a giant, as it had proved in many a drunken brawl.

In an encounter of this sort the vagrant would have had every advantage over the gentleman. One blow from that heavy club would lay the latter senseless. The chances were that it would kill him.

This was what the other thought. He chuckled inwardly with devilish glee. He sat there now, cool, alert, but with madness in his brain, and murder in his heart. With the child's first shriek of fright and pain he would leap the hedge, as a tiger leaps from the jungle. He feared for nothing, cared for nothing now, but vengeance — vengeance, swift and terrible on the man who was drawing near to strike that boy of his — the only thing that he loved on earth.

The gentleman came a step closer to the small figure in the path. It was all done in an instant. He caught the child in his arms, swung him up in the air, and held him above his head.

The boy caught his breath; a look of stunned bewilderment, of swift fright, came into his face. Then he glanced down into the amused eyes of his captor. A child's instincts are swift and sure. They seized the situation, the pure fun of the thing, in a flash. A light broke into the small face. Then the boy gave a chuckle of immense glee. At that sound his captor tossed him in the air, and caught him deftly in his descent. The little fellow burst into shrieks of delight, and the gentleman laughed, too — not so loud, but almost as merrily as the boy.

There was something of a boy at the heart of Robert Beresford. It came to the surface when he frolicked with children. They were very fond of him.

Philip always declared there was no playmate like papa.

The frolic went on for a minute or two before the man, with a swift movement, brought the child down and set him lightly on his feet. Then he stood over him, not speaking a word, but, with a laugh in his eyes.

In his short life the boy had never met with anything like this. Even his father, of whom he was fond, never played with him, and was often harsh or sullen, and swore at him every day. But this stranger seemed only like a grand, strong, beautiful playfellow. The child was already perfectly at ease with him, and eager for a repetition of the fun.

“Well, sir, you liked that, on the whole, did you?” said the gentleman, speaking for the first time, and laying his hand on the small, unkempt head.

The boy plucked his new friend’s coat-sleeve. The little tanned face was radiant.

“Do it a’din, man, do it a’din!” he cried.

“Do it a’din!” repeated the gentleman, patting the head this time. “That is the way you treat me, is it? You walk into my grounds as cool as a prince, and you order me about, as though I had no better business than to hold myself at your beck and nod. No matter where your small boy turns up, he shows himself an inborn tyrant in a twinkling!”

He had no sooner said this, than he bent down again, seized the child, and swung him over his head; and there followed some more of that pretty tossing and catching in the air, with shrieks of rapture from the boy, and the deep bass laughter of the man.

At last Robert Beresford set the boy on the ground.

"There! I think that will do for one morning," he said.

All this time, the figure had been crouching behind the hedge. It had sprung half way to its feet, when the owner of the grounds first laid his hands on the child. A low, fierce growl broke from the man's lips. Another instant, and he would have been over the hedge. But, as he paused for the leap, listening, with strained ears, for the blow, and the shriek that would follow, he saw the boy held aloft in the arms of his captor, and struggling in the air; he saw, an instant later, the look of stunned bewilderment, of swift terror, change into one of immense delight.

At that sight, he crouched back again behind the hedge. Nobody had caught a glimpse of him. He sat there and watched, motionless, breathless, the pretty pantomime that followed. As he gazed, the wolfish glare went slowly out of his eyes, the grip on his club relaxed, while his face had the look of one half-stunned. But through all he kept his blank, unwinking eyes on the two inside the hedge; not a look, not a syllable, not a gesture, escaped him.

In a moment the owner spoke again. "Now tell me your name."

"Joe."

"Well, Joe, you were looking at that swing with big eyes when I saw you. You were thinking it would be a grand thing to get into that fine seat, and

go swinging off, higher and higher, until your feet could brush the sky, or the branch of that big tree. You thought it would be the biggest fun in the world."

"So I did!" exclaimed Joe, his eyes rounder and blacker than ever, on perceiving that his thoughts had been read so perfectly.

But, after all, anything seemed possible to his new friend. Joe would hardly have been surprised if, with a single swoop, he had brought the moon down out of the sky for him to play with.

"You shall try how it feels. You shall have a swing, Joe!"

Before Joe could fully take in the gentleman's meaning, he found himself in the deep, cushioned seat. A light touch sent the swing off bravely into the air. Joe gave a yell of delight. When he came down, another light, strong touch sent him higher. The third time his little, bare feet actually grazed the lowest limb of the horsechestnut. Joe was in a child's seventh heaven. Every time his feet touched the boughs he shrieked with triumph. The gentleman's laugh occasionally mingled with the boy's. After his long writing, the exercise was a real pleasure to Robert Beresford. He owed much of his splendid health to the out-door exercise which he daily gave himself.

At the end of ten minutes, perhaps, the owner stopped the swing. At that instant he caught sight of a figure just behind him, whose large, muscular build was surmounted with a ruddy-complexioned, honest face. The gardener was viewing the scene

before him with stolid amazement. He had been drawn to the spot by the laughter and screams of the child.

The man was used to various little eccentricities on the part of his young master, but his present behavior and companionship put all other things of that sort into the shade.

"Well, Roger," said his master, laughing at the man's amazed stare, "do you think I have taken leave of my senses?"

"It looks a good deal like it, sir," answered the gardener, touching his hat. He was an Englishman, loyal and trusty, as some faithful old mastiff, but his prejudices were obstinate, and poverty and vagrancy always aroused them. "Where did you pick him up?"

"At my feet, literally. He had strolled into the grounds through a gap in the hedge, or through a side gate. He and I have had glorious times for the last twenty minutes — haven't we, Joe?"

"Yes," promptly answered Joe, glancing with the keen instinct of childhood from one face to the other. He would probably have run away from Roger as fast as his sturdy, little legs could carry him, but he was not in the least afraid of Roger's distinguished-looking master.

The latter regarded the boy again with grave earnestness.

"He can't be as old as my boy," he said, "who just rode off with his mother, happy and proud as a prince, his little head full of toy boats and sailing around the world. I believe the thought of him

made my heart softer toward every other little rogue of his size. This one happened to come in my way. Roger," turning suddenly toward the gardener, and looking the man full in the eyes, "why shouldn't this little ragamuffin have a share in my boy's birthday?"

Roger drew a long breath, and looked doubly glum.

"It ain't my business to interfere with your idee, sir," he said, very stiffly, "but he's some wuthless tramp's cub — you may depend on that!"

"Very likely. But the boy isn't to blame for that. If Joe here, had been allowed to choose for himself, his father would be as honest, industrious, and kind-hearted a fellow as you are, Roger Bryke!"

When the man, skulking in the shadow of the hedge, heard that, an expression flashed across his face, the like of which no human being had ever seen there before.

Roger's glumness relaxed at that compliment, and he even regarded Joe with a slightly mollified air.

Once more Robert Beresford laid his hand on the little tangled head.

"Joe," he said, speaking half to himself, out of the abundance of his thoughts, and the fullness of his heart, "I'm sorry for you! I should be glad to do you some good. You have had a hard time of it so far, evidently. It doesn't seem quite fair on your side. I can't see why *my* boy should have been born into all the good fortune — have had all the prizes thrust on him — should know nothing but the soft side of life; should sink into a downy, love-sheltered

nest from the beginning, while you — poor little rascal — have had to be turned out in the cold, to scramble over the stones, to be torn with the briars. When I look at the terrible contrasts in your fates, it seems as though things weren't adjusted on quite a fair basis. Why is the balance in my boy's favor so tremendous? Will you live to grow up, Joe, and wish you had had a chance, and think it would have made a man of you? It goes to my heart to think you may do that sometime — you, who stand there now, looking up at me with your puzzled black eyes."

This speech was, of course, Greek to the boy, who listened, and thrust his dirty little toes into the gravel; but there were two men who heard and understood perfectly.

"Got anybody to take care of you, little boy?" asked the gardener. His tone, as he addressed the child, was very unlike what it would have been ten minutes before.

"Yes," he said; "I've got my father."

"Where is he?"

"He's a lookin' up a job," answered Joe, as though he were repeating a lesson.

He had been thoroughly instructed in this reply, the truth of which depended upon circumstances. He and his father had been tramping around the country for the last month. There was no doubt, in the child's mind, that the man was lurking somewhere in the vicinity. Joe had strolled away that morning as he was in the habit of doing. The gate, accidentally left open, and the pleasant grounds, had

attracted him, as they certainly would his father, if a chance had offered to help himself to anything inside.

While this talk was going on between the gardener and Joe, Robert Beresford looked at his watch. It was later than he supposed. In his business life, his mind had grown used to rapid processes, to prompt decisions. He resolved on the instant.

“Roger,” he said, “I haven’t a moment to spare. Some important letters must wait for the next mail, to pay for my half hour’s frolic with Joe.” If the speaker could have dreamed what fate hung for him on that half hour! “But I want you to take him up to the house, put him into Martha’s hands, and tell her to give him a bath; and when he is clean as her scrubbing can make him, tell her to dress him in one of Philip’s suits. Something the boy has outgrown will just fit this one,” measuring Joe’s sturdy little figure with his rapid glance. “Your wife will know how to do this thing perfectly; and I want Joe thoroughly dressed, from his cap to his shoe strings, and to have afterward a breakfast set before him — the best the house affords — mind. Tell Martha I trust the thing in her hands. Ask her to do it for my sake.”

“I’ll tell her, sir; and Martha’ll carry out your orders to the letter. But — beggin’ your pardon — what are you doin’ all this to the little beggar for?”

“What am I doing it for?” repeated Roger’s master. “I hardly know myself. I suspect Phil and his birthday have a good deal to do with it. I want

Joe to have a share in my boy's fun. I really haven't any plans regarding him. One learns to be chary about meddling with other people's lives. Bring the little waif up to the library, after he has had his breakfast, and we will see what Martha and clean clothes have done for him. It won't hurt him to go back to his father with a new suit and a full stomach, will it, Joe?"

As he said that, the speaker took Joe's little soiled hand in his palm. The boy had listened, with round, puzzled eyes, to all this talk; he comprehended very little of it; but he would have gone that morning with his new friend to the end of the earth.

They turned toward the house. Roger followed a little in their rear. When they came to the path which led to the side of the house, Joe's friend paused.

"You must go with this man now, Joe," he said. "He will take good care of you."

Joe hesitated a moment, and glanced up doubtfully into the gardener's face. When the man saw that, he smiled a little encouraging smile on the boy.

Then Joe took his little, black paw from the gentleman and placed it in the gardener's big, red hand, and trotted off contentedly by his side. Robert Beresford stood a moment, watching them, with a smile in his eyes.

"Joe isn't the only one who will get some good out of this!" he said to himself, as he went to the library.

But he did not suspect there was another of whom this might be said. The man with the weather-beaten, sullen face, still sat in the shadow of the hedge. He had thrown his club in the young grass, where the dews still lingered. His big hands were locked together, his powerful frame shivered sometimes with an inward sob. For the most part, however, he sat motionless, while out of eyes that, a little while ago, had blazed with wrath and vengeance, a few tears dropped slowly, and shone in the coarse, ragged beard.

Two hours later Joe sat in the kitchen, before what, in his eyes, was a banquet for princes. A kindly-faced, middle-aged woman, was watching him with a good deal of interest. It was difficult for her to recognize in the shining-faced boy before her, with his fresh brown jacket, and his bit of snowy collar, the ragged little vagrant whom her husband had brought to her two hours ago. The mop of stubborn hair had yielded at last to Martha's patient fingers, and now lay smooth and curly around the open, tanned forehead. She had a right to feel some pride in the transformation she had effected.

As for Joe himself, he must have found it difficult to realize his identity. He was half starved, too. Never had such tempting rolls, such fragrant coffee, such juicy steak passed his lips. He ate and drank with the greediness of a young animal; but in the midst of it all, he would pause occasionally to inspect his new trousers, or to lift up one foot, and, with his head a little on one side, stare, solemn and admiring, at his polished boot.

Martha had turned away to hide a smile at that sight, when somebody called her in a loud, frightened voice. She went out in a hurry, leaving Joe all alone. Then he heard a sharp cry, and other voices that seemed full of amazement and terror. There was a rushing to and fro, the tread of heavy feet in the halls. Joe began to feel that something had happened. But he ate on, pausing to listen, between the mouthfuls, and nobody came near him.

At last his appetite was sated, and then the stillness and strangeness began to oppress him; he grew uneasy; he wished Roger would come and take him to the man who knew how to play better than a boy, for all he was such a grand gentleman; and finally, Joe slipped off his seat and went to the door, hoping he should get a glimpse of somebody. But he found nothing outside but the bright sunshine, and the young leaves astir in the soft air, and he heard the birds singing in the stillness; he looked carefully around him for some signs of human life as he went slowly to the gate by which he had first entered the grounds. All the time he had a feeling that something was in the air. When he reached the gate, he glanced up and down the lane. Then he caught sight of his father, skulking in the shadow of the hedge. The two had separated on the edge of the town that morning. It was nothing for Joe to stroll off by himself, for an hour or two. Some feeble glimmer of self-respect still showed itself in the fiction which the man kept up of looking out for a job, when idleness and bad habits forced him off with Joe on a tramp.

He could not leave the boy behind. Joe's mother had sunk out of life years before — crushed by toil and hardship.

Joe went softly up the lane to the man. His new clothes sat oddly upon him. He felt very grand, and a little ashamed withal. He was curious to see whether the man would recognize him.

Joe stole up to the back of the big, shambling figure, clasping with its hands its knees.

“Father!” he said softly.

The man turned sharply at that, and saw the little figure standing there, with its clean face and its fresh clothes. What a contrast to the ragged little cub he had seen scampering away from him down on the railroad!

Joe stood quite still, while his father looked him slowly over. At last, when his gaze had taken in everything, from the neat little cap to the polished boots, he broke out: “Who'd 'a' believed they could 'a' smartened you up into such a young buck, Joe! How do you like fine clothes, you little dog?”

“I think they's jolly,” answered Joe. “Other things has happened which was jolly, too.”

“I know that,” replied the man. “I was sittin' here all the time. I heard what went on the other side!”

At that, Joe had not a word to say, but his eyes grew big with astonishment. He stared at his father awhile in silence, then he squatted down on the grass beside him. He had come, primed with a tale of miracles, and now there seemed nothing to tell.

But his father was curious about what had happened in the house. Joe related everything to the best of his ability. But he had no language to express the feeling which had crept over him in the strangeness and stillness, and which had sent him out of the house with a vague fear.

After he had done questioning, the man sat still a long time, gazing at Joe. The boy fancied his father was inspecting his new clothes, but there was a grave, softened expression in the whole face. Something was at work in the man's brain; something was pulling at his heart. At last it became audible.

"Joe," he said, suddenly, and his tone made the boy look up in a startled way, "you'd have a grand time if you could go and live with that gentleman. S'pose now, you could do it? He'd take good care of you. He'd al'ays be thinkin' of his own boy, when he see you about. If he'd given his word, he'd keep it; he'd make a man of you. You'd have fine clo'es all the time, and good things to eat, and a soft bed to sleep in. Your little legs wouldn't grow tired trampin' around the country, and you'd have a chance to be somethin' like other boys as has homes, and comforts, and those as care for 'em. Now, Joe, own up! You'd like all that, wouldn't you? Likely as not you could live in this grand house, and play in the grounds every day; and that fine gentleman would have an eye on you, and see you didn't want for anything. You'd like all that now, Joe, wouldn't you?"

Joe's black eyes sparkled, his little, tanned face flushed with delighted anticipation.

“I should like it — lots an’ lots!” he cried.

Then his father rose. “Come, Joe,” he said, in a loud, resolute tone. “I’ve made up my mind. I’m goin’ to take you to that grand gentleman, and ask him to give you a chance. I’m goin’ to tell him to do it, as he did them other things to-day — for the sake of his own boy! Come along!”

Joe slipped his little, hard hand in his father’s with alacrity. Then he glanced at the club lying in the grass. He had seen that before. His father had carried it off from the old barn into which the two had crept after dark and passed the night in the sweet-smelling hay.

“What are you goin’ to do with that, father?” asked Joe.

The man seized the club with a muttered curse, and shot it with all his strength, to the other side of the lane; then he took Joe’s hand again, and they trudged on together.

The boy’s head was full of the grand times that were coming — of frolics, and swings, and wonderful breakfasts, and, above all, of the kind gentleman to smile on him and play with him every day. His imagination was bewitched with visions wild and lovely enough for a fairy-tale, only Joe had never heard of fairy-tales.

Suddenly he heard his father speaking. “One of these days you’ll get so fine, Joe, you’ll be ashamed of your old dad, and with reason enough, too. He ain’t been much of a father to you. But he’ll be lonely a good many times, and miss his little boy that’s been a comfort to him when we’ve been off

round the country, lookin' out for a job. There'll be days and nights as'll hang heavy without you, Joe!"

The man stopped short there. When Joe looked up, he saw something shining on his father's eye-lashes. The round little face suddenly grew grave. The sparkle of hope and anticipation went out of the boy's eyes. Some new thought was at work in his brain; some new feeling tugged at his heart. At last, just as they reached the gate, he stood still; he pulled at the man's sleeve.

"Father," he said, "you — you needn't go in there. I'll stay with you, and go off on the tramp."

There was a pause. A struggle worked in the man's face. It shook even his big, slouching figure. Then he spoke with dogged resolve: "No, Joe; I won't have it on my conscience that I stood in your way. You shall have a chance, I say!" and he hurried the boy inside the gate as though he were afraid to trust himself.

Joe's father knocked at the back door until his hard knuckles stung. It stood ajar, just as Joe had left it, affording an opportunity for one who had been disposed to enter and help himself to anything on which he could lay his hands.

At last a maid came to the door. She had an absent, scared look, but she had not Martha's pleasant face. Her first glance at Joe's father was not likely to impress her in his favor. He asked for the master of the house.

"You can't see him to-day," she answered, curtly. "He's gone away, and it's in great trouble he is."

“But I must see him,” said Joe’s father, very decidedly. “I ain’t a tramp, woman. I’ve business with your master. It’s about this boy. He wants to see him,” and he pushed Joe forward.

“You can’t see him to-day, I tell you,” said the maid, excitedly. Then she broke out, more probably for the sake of relieving her feelings, than to enlighten Joe’s father: “The poor gentleman has gone to the mistress; he was writing in his library when they came for him. The ponies ran away with her, and they’re afraid she’s killed, though they hadn’t the heart to tell him; and now he’s gone to her, he’ll find out for himself. Oh, the beautiful lady!” and with that she burst into a loud wail and shut the door in the faces of the two.

Joe’s chance was gone! That day his father met some of his old comrades. They drank together and afterward set out on their tramp.

The same night Stacey Beresford was brought back to the home out of which she had passed in smiling loveliness that spring morning.

The ponies were turning a sharp curve in the road, when a great elm tree which they were cutting down in a field near by, fell with a terrible crash. The horses took fright, and dashed along the road for some distance, their mistress vainly striving to hold them. On one side of the road was a bank, which fell, steep and ragged, into a deep ravine. It was all over in an instant!

Philip was picked up on the edge of the bank, with only a few bruises. But they found his

mother on the other side, lying in the rocky hollow, beneath the ruins of her phaeton. She opened her eyes and stared bewildered around her. Then she closed them again without a moan. Stacey Beresford's eyes had looked their last on the world!

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER NINE YEARS.

IT would be nine years in September since Lenox Dare went away from Briarswild. They who waited in the June twilight said this to each other, and found it hard to believe their own words. Time had passed smoothly and swiftly over the Mavis household. The first year of Lenox's absence had, of course, been the one when she was missed most keenly. Yet it was not in the nature of mother or son to indulge unavailing regrets.

Lenox's letters, too, seemed almost like that young, joyous presence in the household. Her friends knew, from month to month, where she was — what she was doing. She wrote always in the confident expectation of returning the next year. Some good reason as constantly delayed that event.

“But it was only one year more, after all!” Mrs. Mavis would say, with her usual habit of looking at the bright side of things, and Ben always acquiesced with apparent cheerfulness. Each knew, too, that the separation might be ended any moment. Tom Apthorp would keep his promise. They had only to speak the word, and Lenox and her uncle would cross the sea. That conviction, however,

imposed a double reticence upon the pair. They would never stand in the way of the girl's highest good.

But at last she was coming home! They were looking for her as the brown, summer twilight deepened in the air, and they sat in the sitting-room — so little changed — where Lenox had stood on that night when she first came to them. They thought of this sometimes, although they did not speak of it — perhaps they would not — even if a third — one who had never seen Lenox Dare — had not sat with them.

There was a kind of repressed excitement in the air. Even Mrs. Mavis's busy hands were still, while her ears were strained, listening for the sound of carriage wheels up the road. It was by no means certain the travellers would arrive that night. The steamer might not be in time for them to take the early train. They would be tired with their long voyage. Mrs. Mavis said this to Ben, and then she remembered there could be no rest for Lenox Dare like that which awaited her under the roof at Briarswild!

Mrs. Mavis's face wears its old brightness, as she sits there in her black silk dress and becoming cap. If she has grown thinner and older, that will be left for Lenox to find out. Ben, seeing her every day, is not conscious of any change. The nine years have set their mark on him in all gracious ways. Nobody can look upon the broad-chested, shapely-limbed, manly young fellow without admiring him. He has grown used to responsibilities, to respect, and a certain deference from those about him. His shrewd

sense, his high integrity, gave his opinions great weight in the township, and outside of it. Meanwhile the old Mavis farm thrived under its young owner's care, and the affairs of the county usually prospered when he had a hand in them.

The third person that waited, as I said, with the mother and son, that June twilight, was a young woman two or three years past twenty. If you saw her for the first time your inward exclamation would be, "What a pretty creature!" and the thought would be sure to repeat itself every time you turned to gaze on her. Her glossy hair, full of rich auburn tints, her face with its soft curves of youth and health, her eyes of the summer's own blue, and her delicate rose-bloom made a picture, not of marvelous beauty, but of rare prettiness.

Dorrice Cropsey had been at the Mavis farm for the last two years. She was an orphan — her only kin a brother who was seeking his fortune at the West. She was a niece of the husband of Ben's aunt. The Mavises had found the girl with their relative on their last visit. Dorrice was a mere child at the time, but her bright prattle, her sparkling face, had helped to cheer the darkness of those days. On his way West, Dorrice's brother — a good many years her senior — had brought his sister to visit at Briars-wild. She had remained there ever since. Mrs. Mavis had become attached to the girl. Ben liked her, too. Indeed it was impossible to live with Dorrice Cropsey and not like her. She was an arch, playful, warm-hearted creature. If she was not brilliant nor witty she had pretty, quaint ways of manner

and of speech. She sang about the house like a bird; she flitted around the rooms like sunshine. Dorrice was on the *qui vive* with expectation. She had been hearing about Lenox ever since she came to the homestead. She had listened to her letters, and was prepared to admire her immensely; for Dorrice had the capacity for worship of simple, ardent natures. She was dressed daintily in some light, cool, summer fabric, with pink ribbons at her throat. Her cheeks and eyes had an unusual glow. Young Mavis noticed that when he roused himself from a reverie. They had all been a little silent, since they came in, an hour ago, from the supper-table.

Dorrice looked so pretty that Ben smiled at her. That frank, kindly smile brought to light the secret thought that had been at work in Dorrice's head all day.

"She has seen so much of the world — she is such a grand lady that I am almost afraid to meet her!"

"You need not be afraid, Dorrice," said Ben.

One might almost fancy there was a little exultant thrill in his tones.

At that instant they caught the sound of wheels up the road. A moment later a carriage was in sight. It whirled rapidly along. It was at the gate almost before they were at the door. Before any one else could alight, a lady, young and tall, had leaped swiftly to the ground.

"O Mrs. Mavis!" she cried. It was the voice of Lenox Dare. It thrilled the air with its old, familiar sweetness.

"Oh, my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Mavis, and the two women hung upon each other.

Ben was there — Lenox saw him a moment later — standing in his stalwart young manhood by the side of his mother. Before she could speak, her uncle had joined the group, and the two men were clasping hands.

At the door Dorrice met them with her smiles and roses — a welcoming Hebe.

As Lenox crossed the threshold, Mrs. Mavis called to her: "Stand still, my dear! My eyes have grown dim. I want to see how you look — to find out what all these years have been doing to you!"

Lenox stood still, and the hall-light streamed over her, and the four people gazed upon her.

The summer after Lenox Dare went abroad she and her uncle were among the Alps. One afternoon they were coming down a narrow pass, to their hotel in the valley below. Lenox's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes brightened with the toil and excitement of her five hours' climb. A couple of young men, turning a sharp corner of the rocks, came suddenly upon the girl and her uncle. She had paused a moment to take breath, leaning upon her Alpenstock. She wore a straw hat, and a simple mountain-suit. As she looked up and returned the strangers' salutation, all the color about her was in her glowing face. One of the young men, a minute later, remarked, with a slightly foreign accent, to his companion: "What a handsome creature she was!"

Lenox's uncle knew she overheard the remark. She started and glanced up at him, with a face full of surprise, and a heightened color in her cheeks; but she said nothing.

That evening, however, he noticed that the girl was absorbed, and that even the view from their hotel window, of snow-crowned ranges, in all their burning splendors of sunset, failed to attract her. They were standing together, when he turned suddenly and said, "What is it, Lenox?"

She hesitated a moment, then she answered with her usual transparency: "You heard what that young man said after we passed him on the mountain this afternoon?"

"I heard, Lenox."

"Can it possibly be true? I never dreamed of such a thing:" she added this last remark to herself.

Tom Apthorp watched his niece curiously. She actually went across the room to a mirror, and surveyed herself in the glass from head to foot. Her uncle knew enough of womankind to perceive what a turning-point this might be in the girl's life. He felt as though he could have sent the young fellow to the foot of the Alps. Lenox's simplicity had had an endless charm for the wordly-wise man. Was all that gone now? he asked himself. Had the breath of the world passed over that virgin freshness, and dimmed it forever?

In a few minutes, Lenox came back to her uncle. There was a puzzled look on her face.

"Uncle Tom, can it possibly be true?" She asked again, with an earnestness that was half amusing, half pathetic.

The man looked at her a few moments, silently, critically. He tried to divest himself of any partiality which might bias his judgment. What a girlish, half-

childish face it was under the shadow of those masses of hair! It was a face dark and thin. Its curves lacked roundness, its cheeks lacked color. But there could be no question about the brown eyes, or the delicate arch of the dark brows, or the perfect line of the lips, behind which glimmered the beautiful teeth that were the birthright of the Apthorps. Plainly it was a face that had not come to its possibilities. Her uncle felt that any opinion he might now express would be premature. But Lenox found that long, silent gaze insupportable. She had flushed to her temples, and was turning away, when her uncle spoke: "Ask me this question eight years later, Lenox, and I shall be able to answer you."

"Eight years later!" repeated Lenox, with an incredulous laugh. "By that time, Uncle Tom, I shall be too old to care about my looks!"

But it seemed to her uncle she was never the same simple, unconscious girl, after she caught, in the Alpine pass, the stranger's remark that afternoon.

She never recurred to it, however, and it was more than eight years before her uncle did. They were in London then, and had been to dine with some of his old Calcutta friends.

"Lenox," said her uncle, when they were alone together, "you remember that first summer we were in Switzerland, how we both overheard a remark about you, as we came down the mountain pass?"

"Perfectly."

"You asked me a question that night which I was not then prepared to answer. I promised to do it,

however, eight years later. You have not asked me that question again."

Lenox came now and stood before her uncle.

"There was no need I should ask you, Uncle Tom," she said, with a kind of triumphant thrill in her voice. "I knew!"

"And you are glad of it?"

"I am a woman, and you can ask me such a question?"

Lenox Dare stands only a moment in the hall at Briarswild, with the light flooding over her. But it is long enough. No one who saw that picture will ever forget it; and of the four who gazed on the woman one was her lover.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Mavis, in a tone that was half-amazement, half-motherly pride, "you have been growing a beauty! I never dreamed of your doing that."

The travellers had hurried from the steamer, not stopping for even a day's rest after their voyage. "We can take our ease at Briarswild, Uncle Tom," Lenox said. "Until we get there I shall have no rest—even on my native soil."

She went straight to the sitting-room. She could not fail to remember now that other night when she stood here a worn and homeless wanderer. As she glanced around the familiar room that old scene rose before her. She could not have spoken her thought at that moment, even had her uncle not been at her side. He did not suspect the memory that shook her for an instant, but two others did when they saw how she paused, how her lips suddenly trembled.

She took her old seat by the window, in silence; but a little later a look of ineffable content stole over her face. "How good it is to be at home again!" she murmured.

She said that to herself constantly, for days and nights that followed. She roamed about the house and grounds like one in a happy dream. The morning after her arrival she went to Dainty's stall. The creature whinnied when she heard her mistress' voice, and felt the touch of those soft fingers about her mane. The little, high-bred colt, that had played so important a part in Lenox's history, was always kept in splendid condition. The men believed that young Mavis would sooner have parted with all the animals in his stables than with that fleet, gray mare.

Once more the old rooms were filled with the bright, inspiring presence. There was so much to hear and tell, after these nine years, that seemed hardly like two now they were all together again. The changes they had wrought in Lenox grew more apparent the longer one saw her. She had gone out from Briarswild a mere slip of a girl — she came back to it now, a graceful, elegant woman.

Tom Apthorp had kept his word. He had more than fulfilled the promises he had made to his niece that summer afternoon, in the Mavis orchard. To indulge his young kinswoman, to afford her every advantage and opportunity which had been denied her childhood, became the central purpose of the man's life. No doubt a secret remorse was at the bottom of all this. Tom Apthorp spared neither time, pains, nor money in the accomplishment of

his purpose. Lenox had the best masters the world afforded. She studied the languages in their native air. She visited the great capitals of Europe; their palaces, cathedrals, and picture-galleries. The treasures of all the schools of art were laid open to a soul which nature had formed to enter far into their secret, and read their meanings of eternal truth and beauty. Her life was full, rich, varied. Her uncle watched, with secret pride and delight, the blossoming of this rare flower into womanhood.

“My little girl shall have the best of the world at last!” he said to himself.

Each year his plans for her development, his desire to afford her new opportunities, took some fresh form, some wider range. It was these alone which had kept them so long abroad. A return to Briarswild — even for a visit — would have seriously interfered with his plans at the time.

To one who understood there would have been something pathetic in the man’s resolve not to lose a moment, to secure the best for Lenox while there was yet time. He never thought of his dead sister, without a pang smote his conscience for his long neglect of her orphan child. A coarser nature would not have so sternly reckoned with itself; a commoner one would not have been so passionately bent on retrieving an unconscious wrong.

Tom Apthorp had, through his long residence in India, a wide European acquaintance. In whatever country they traveled, he could introduce his niece to the best circles. She met the most celebrated men and women — poets, artists, statesmen, — the gen-

iuses, the commanding intellects, the great brains and hearts of the world. Sometimes, in the midst of spacious, thronged drawing-rooms, Lenox Dare's thoughts would suddenly slip away to the old turnpike, to the little attic-chamber, with its small window-panes and its rows of books; she would see herself a lonely orphan girl, feeding her soul, like Charles Lamb, on "that fair and wholesome pasturage of English reading."

Perhaps that sudden vision, in the midst of all the splendor, made her heart pitiful for all desolate souls, and kept her head from growing a little giddy in the world's atmosphere of prosperity and flattery.

She began to be very much admired. Her beauty opened slowly, year by year, into its perfect flower. Then she had a power, a fascination, which went deeper than all her beauty, which would hold men and women when that faded. She had a marvelous gift of drawing out the best, sincerest side of people. In her companionship men and women seemed to find anew the dreams of their youth, the aspirations of their noblest hours. Women of the world, dizzied by its flatteries and ambitions, seemed in her presence, to go back to the fresh heart of their girlhood.

If she was such a joyful, stimulating influence in the lives of her friends, it is impossible to say what she was to her sole kinsman. His love and pride centered themselves on her, the last of his race — the young girl who took the place of wife and daughter to the wifeless, childless man.

Lenox, in her turn, met no man whom she thought

could bear a moment's comparison with her uncle. She repaid his devotion with a passion of gratitude. That atmosphere of mystery and romance which, in her eyes, had invested him when he first appeared to her — a marvelous surprise, from the ends of the earth — still surrounded him.

With her woman's intuition Lenox had divined the secret remorse of her uncle's life. She never quite forgave herself for the reproaches that had once broken from her. Since that time, neither had alluded to them. Lenox could not save her uncle from the stinging memory of his long neglect ; but she had her own ways of showing how she felt all he had done for her — what he had made of her life in these later years. Their confidence in each other was absolute. The stately, handsome, elderly man, and the young, beautiful woman, were often taken for newly-wedded husband and wife — a fact which, whenever it came to their knowledge, afforded the pair infinite amusement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE WORD.

LENOX DARE had been at Briarswild three days, when she and Ben Mavis came out on the piazza for a walk. It was the loveliest of evenings, with drowsing winds, and a full summer moon. He gave her his arm, and for a little while they walked in silence. The moonlight shone on the beautifully-shaped head, on all the clear, delicate curves of cheek, and lip, and brow of the woman, and on the strong, broad-chested figure and handsome face of the young man.

Ben was nearly thirty now, though he did not look so ; and one would hardly have taken Lenox to be twenty-five, though she was almost three years older ; her life was not like those flowers which reach their perfection of bloom and fragrance in the spring-time—it was of that rarer kind, which need the slow, rich summer for their full unfolding.

When Lenox looked up she met the glance of Ben's clear gray eyes.

“ They seem like a dream, Ben,” she said, “ these nine years since you and I walked here, on just such nights as this.”

“ You thought of the walks, then, sometimes, Lenox ? ”

“Thought of them!” she echoed, in a surprised, rather hurt tone. “I don’t believe you can imagine, especially now you have asked that question, just what it seems to me to be walking here again!”

“I, too, have thought of those old evenings, Lenox,” he said, with a voice steady as her own, “when I walked here in the moonlight alone.”

She heard the words, without dreaming that any hidden meaning lurked in them. In all these years a suspicion that young Mavis’s feeling for her was unlike her own for him, had never crossed her mind. When they first met, Lenox was too much of a child for any possible dream of love. Then the very closeness of their household life had not been in Ben’s favor. Her imagination required mystery and distance to fascinate it. Ben had seen this long ago; his love had made him wise; he knew their intimacy had been his misfortune.

“You are just the grand, loyal fellow you always were!” said Lenox, again. “I knew how you would miss me, and think of the old times, and wish they were all they had been before Uncle Tom came. O, Ben!” her voice suddenly shook, “do you think I can forget?”

“Forget what, Lenox?”

“Where I was when you first found me. It always seemed that I had not been half grateful enough —”

Young Mavis suddenly stood still, as though a blow had struck him.

“I hate that word!” he exclaimed, in a tone of passionate bitterness. “Never let me hear you speak it, Lenox, as long as we live!” His voice was half a groan, and half a command.

She was a little startled at his vehemence ; but it was like him, she thought. The generous soul resented any hint of debt on her part.

“Forgive me, Ben ; I did not mean to pain you,” she said.

“I am sure of that, Lenox.”

With her woman’s quick tact she began to talk of other matters — of the household life, so little altered, of the delight of coming home, and finding so few changes in the people or the world around her, making it seem, after all, as though she had only been gone on a visit.

“A visit that lasted nine years, Lenox !” suggested Ben.

“I know ; but they hardly seem like two to-night.”

He did not reply, and after a little pause she spoke again : “There was another evening, Ben, which I used to remember, almost as often as that first one.”

“What evening was that, Lenox ?”

“It was the one before Uncle Tom came. Everything that happened about that time was always coming up to me. You and I had a long walk on the piazza. It was just such a summer night as this — not a cloud in the sky ; only the stars and a great, solemn moon. I plucked my solitary tea-rose, and fastened it in your buttonhole, that night. Of course you have forgotten all about it.”

“No, I have not forgotten. I have kept that withered tea-rose all these years, Lenox.”

Had any other man than Ben Mavis made this speech to Lenox Dare it might have awakened some suspicions in her mind. She was a woman. She had

learned the power of her beauty, the spell of her charms. But her grateful, sisterly affection for young Mavis had no touch of romantic sentiment. The notion of his being her lover would have seemed as absurd now as it did in the days when Guy Fosdick used to jest about him.

"Have you that rose, still?" she asked, surprised and touched. "And my little bush, with its one flower, has spread into a great tree! I could not count its blossoms now. Do you mean to say, Ben, you have tended my rose-bush through all these years because of that flower I gave you?"

"I mean to say just that, Lenox."

Whenever he recalled the talk of that night, this moment always seemed to Ben Mavis its most perilous one. A fierce desire surged through him to turn and clasp this woman madly to his heart; to tell her what she had been to him all these years; to pray her to have mercy on the love which had become, in silence and absence, a part of his life.

And while the fire leaped along his pulses, and the brave young heart and the strong brain wavered, he heard again the voice at his side. She was speaking of his mother.

"Is it my fancy, Ben, or is she looking pale and shadowy? It struck me that she was, when I first saw her; and though the impression has partly worn off I cannot get rid of a feeling that she is not quite well — not just her old self."

"She never complains," he answered. "I see her every day, and that may be the reason I have noticed no change."

Then Lenox spoke of Dorrice Cropsey.

"What an arch, winsome creature she is — pretty enough, too, to sit for an artist when he would paint

'Flora

Peering in April's front.'"

"Dorrice is like sunlight in the house," he answered. "She has been a great comfort to mother, ever since she came here."

But though he made these replies promptly and steadily enough, his heart was not in them.

At last Lenox came back to himself again.

"After all, Ben, I believe that nobody has changed quite so much as you have."

"I! What do you mean, Lenox?"

"That every change is for the better, Ben."

She smiled up at him in the moonlight — a smile that finished her speech, with a flattery, delicate beyond any words.

"Ah, Lenox," he replied, "I might well say that of you. I might tell you how you are changed in all wonderful and beautiful ways; but I have no speech fine enough to express my thoughts. Other men must have told you all that I would, in words that would make mine seem poor and bungling."

"No, Ben, that is not true. Your praise must always seem something dearer and better than other men's."

She spoke now with the low, serious tone he knew so well — the tone when she was very much in earnest.

Ben's heart leaped again. "Do you mean all that, Lenox?" and he stopped her where the moonlight could shine full upon her face.

"I mean all that. How could it be otherwise. Ben — *my brother?*"

What a tender name it was — what a soft voice that spoke it; and yet that last word shot a terrible bolt through Ben Mavis's heart. He knew then, how his hope had lived on, silent and secret, through all these years. He knew, too, those last words of hers had been its death blow!

There was a sob in his throat. And the woman who walked by his side, in the moonlight, never dreamed of what she had done.

In a little while he heard her speaking again.

"I want to ask you a question, Ben. May I?"

"Ask anything you like, Lenox."

"Has any woman, since I have gone away —"

"I know what you mean, Lenox," he interrupted, sharply. "It is the only perfectly silly question you ever asked me. There is no other woman."

"I am glad to hear you say that; though, no doubt, the feeling is wickedly selfish on my part. But it is good to come back and find that nobody else is in my place."

"You will always come back and find that, Lenox," he said, in a tone of mocking gayety, because he feared that any other would fail, and betray him. "I am as deeply vowed to old bachelorhood as any old monk to his beads and his cell."

She laughed lightly at that, but she answered half-seriously: "You will not always tell me that, Ben. Perdita may long be in hiding, but you will come across her some day, and you will know your princess when you see her."

“That is too pretty a fancy, Lenox, to go so wide of the mark. I begin to suspect —”

She stopped him there. “I know what you are going to say. There is not truth enough in it Ben, to point your jest.”

“But there may be, sometime. If you will talk that stuff about Perditas why should not I retort with Florizels?”

“Why, indeed! But whatever may be ‘some-time,’ I have answered you to-night with perfect frankness.”

Before he could reply, Dorrice came out of the house toward them, and the flush on her cheeks might have been stolen from the very pink of the apple-blossoms.

CHAPTER XIX.

DORRICE CROPSEY.

THE Mavis household kept a long holiday that summer. Lenox took up the old girlish life as naturally and heartily as though the years and the world had not come between, and wrought their changes in her. She visited all her old haunts, in company with her uncle, or young Mavis, or Dorrice. She was off every morning with Dainty, among the hill roads. They all went on frequent drives, too, for even Mrs. Mavis was persuaded into joining the others, and the party would return merry and hungry, in the twilight, to their late suppers.

Mr. Apthorp vastly enjoyed the settling down for the summer, in the softly-lined home-nest from which he had taken his niece. He had a natural pride in showing her friends how the result justified his wisdom, though the separation had seemed so cruel at the time he proposed it.

Ben Mavis had his pride, too — of a different sort. It had been powerful enough, long ago, to resist all the strength of his young passion. It had made him scorn to take advantage of Lenox's youth, and ignorance of the world, when, had he pressed his suit, the chances were all in his favor.

That time was passed now. Lenox was no longer an inexperienced girl. She had seen the world; she was acquainted with men; she could weigh him in the balance with others.

But it was the old pride, at bottom, which still held young Mavis silent. He knew that the name Lenox had given him expressed the real nature of her feeling for him from the beginning. It must be the same to the end of their lives. No tie of marriage could change the eternal nature of things. He knew perfectly that he would have an advantage over every other suitor in the tender associations of their youth — in the passionate gratitude with which she regarded him. But he saw clearly that, if Lenox Dare consented to be his wife, it must be with doubtful, half-reluctant heart. His own manliness, his feeling of what was due to himself, recoiled from a union such as theirs must be. He had a conviction, too, which grew stronger in their daily intercourse, that Lenox, if ever she married, should choose a man of different temperament from his own. This was not her fault — not his. It was simply the result of their original constitutions. But Ben Mavis knew there was a side of Lenox's nature with which he could have only a partial sympathy. He could not bring to some of her moods the stimulus and companionship so precious to such a woman. A certain intellectual separation must always exist between them. A smaller or less generous nature would not so frankly have admitted the truth to itself. Ben Mavis did it without the slightest feeling of humiliation. Was he to accuse his fate because he was not artist, poet,

genius of any sort? His business was to do his own work in the world — to take his birthright thankfully, and make the best of that. But he knew that a secret sense of his failure toward Lenox Dare would poison his bliss, if she were his wife. The skeleton would always be in his closet — the fear lest some other man could have been to her something more and better than it was in his power to be. The blood flushed his cheeks at the thought of all the miserable doubts and jealousies which might follow in the train of that haunting dread. How clearly he saw — how sternly he reasoned! And all the while his young manhood's passion throbbed in his heart — pleaded in his thought. But he saw that it was best for Lenox, best for himself even, that he should be — what she had called him — the name that had hurt him more than any blow. Thank God, he could fight his battle alone — not even his mother knew!

It was an unutterable joy — at times an infinite pain — to have Lenox about the house — so close, and yet so far apart in his life; but Ben Mavis trod his hard road that summer without flinching.

One day Tom Apthorp went over to Cherry Hollows. He set out without confiding his intention to a soul. He had a curiosity to see the home where his niece had passed her childhood — the greater, perhaps, because he never ceased to hold himself responsible for its loneliness and hardships.

The yellow house by the turnpike had disappeared. Mr. Apthorp learned from the neighbors that it had been burned to the ground one night, nearly eight years before. The Cranes had barely time to make

their escape. Abijah had died suddenly, a few months later. His wife had returned to her old home.

That night Lenox's uncle told her where he had been — what he had learned.

“I should have asked you to accompany me,” he said, “only I feared the effect which those old scenes might have on you.”

She hesitated a moment, before she answered, with a little tremble in her voice: “I think I could have looked on them, Uncle Tom, and faced all they must have revived, so you were by my side.”

But he thought he had done wisely to go alone.

The next day, which was the last of the summer, Lenox happened to be in Dorrice's room. The former had been a good deal moved by what her uncle had told her the night before. Visions of Cherry Hollows had haunted her dreams that night. Old memories clung around the morning. Her heart was unusually tender toward all lonely, orphaned young creatures, such as she herself had been.

Dorrice sparkled and fluttered about her visitor. The girl's archness and quaintness — all her pretty graces of speech and manner came to the surface in Lenox's presence.

The latter was unusually silent that morning. She gazed, with pleased eyes, at the auburn-tinted hair, at the young face, with its blooming color and soft curves. The two had grown very familiar, very fond of each other. Indeed Dorrice had owned to Lenox that she fell in love with her that night she came home, and stood under the hall lamp.

The girl suddenly came to her visitor's side,

dropped on a stool at her feet, crossed a pair of round, white arms on her lap, and said, rather gravely: "You are thinking about me, Lenox. I see that in your eyes. Tell me about it."

Lenox leaned forward and stroked the uplifted face.

"I was thinking, my dear," she said, "that my heart was glad to see you so happy this morning — so sheltered from every harsh wind of life. O Dorrice, I know how the world looks when one is out in it, lost and alone! I know how long the way seems now."

Dorrice's puzzled look recalled Lenox to herself. The girl had been told next to nothing of those painful facts which antedated Lenox's coming to Briarswild.

"Never think again of what I said just now," resumed Lenox, after a little pause. "I want to talk about yourself, dear — to tell you how you remind me of birds and butterflies, of sunbeams, and all beautiful, happy, unconscious things."

At that speech a sudden change came over Dorrice; the fair cheeks flushed; the lips of the reddest rose-bloom trembled. Then she burst into a passion of weeping.

"What is the matter, Dorrice?" cried Lenox, in amazement.

"That is precisely what you all think of me," sobbed Dorrice. "I am no better in the eyes of any of you, than a year-old baby, who must be indulged and petted to any degree, but who is not capable of a thought, a care, a sorrow of its own. I tell you

it isn't true," she continued, with passionate resentment. "I am not a bird, a butterfly, or any other of those happy, senseless things, to which you choose to compare me. I am a woman, and have my own burdens to carry — my own sorrows to —" Something checked the indignant utterance at this point; she laid her head in Lenox's lap, and sobbed again.

Lenox bent over her in dismay. She stroked the auburn head. Some hidden grief lurked, after all, in the flower of this young life!

"I wouldn't hurt you for the world, Dorrice," she said.

"There is no need you should tell me that, Lenox." The girl lifted her flushed, tear-stained face. "Do forgive my folly, but you surprised me into it. You only said what you — what all the others believe!" and again the indignant bitterness crept into her voice.

"Dorrice," said Lenox, softly, "is this trouble anything that I can help?"

A wild look came into Dorrice's eyes. A flood of scarlet stained her cheeks.

"There is nothing anybody can help," she burst out. Then she sprung to her feet, glancing around her in a frightened way. An open book lay on the table, close at hand. When Dorrice caught sight of that, she started and stared at Lenox a moment, like a creature driven to bay. She made a movement to close the volume, then she drew back, as though she feared to attract her companion's notice.

She made an effort to recover herself.

"Do forget my foolishness!" she cried, with a

little hysterical laugh. "If you will excuse my rudeness I will run away for five minutes, and be back again — myself!"

Lenox sat still, after the girl had gone, greatly troubled over what had passed. Suddenly, and not in the least thinking of what she was doing, she bent over the open page, on the table. The next moment she was reading Tennyson's "Dora." Her eyes glanced along these words:

"But the youth, because
He had been always with her in the house,
Thought not of Dora."

Lenox had seen the look, with which the girl turned from the open page to her face. That look held Dorrice Cropsey's secret! With a flash of woman's intuition Lenox's thought leaped to the truth. Dorrice's secret was her love for Ben Mavis!

While the two young women were having this talk Mr. Apthorp and Ben were having another, as they returned from a sharp canter over the hills. Indeed, the elder man got into the habit of telling his thoughts to the younger, this summer. The more he saw of his host, the more he found to admire and trust in the brave, manly young fellow. But Lenox's uncle, with all his wordly wisdom, never dreamed that his coming to Briarswild had destroyed the dearest hope of that young life.

Ben's impression on meeting Mr. Apthorp, the night of his return, very much resembled Lenox's feelings when she saw Mrs. Mavis. It was not, merely, that the man had grown older, but it struck young Mavis that there was an air of failing strength

about him. As in Lenox's case, the first impression had partly worn off. It recurred to him, however, during the talk that morning, in which Lenox's uncle rather surprised young Mavis with his confidence. The naturally reticent man laid open his plans for the future to his companion. He deplored the necessity which would compel their return to Europe in the autumn. He had, it appeared, entered into some business relations in England, where his presence could not be dispensed with. He expressed a determination to wind up his affairs there as soon as possible, and return to his native land to spend the rest of his days. He had a fancy to settle down near his birthplace in some quiet corner, where he could listen to the sound of the seas which had sung him to sleep in his boyhood.

After this the speaker alluded to a nearer plan, on which he had set his heart. He wanted his neice to see something more of her own country — to have a glimpse of its famous summer-resorts, before they sailed. The trip, which he did not intend should occupy more than two or three weeks, would take in Niagara and Newport, Saratoga and the White Mountains. Their pleasure would be greatly enhanced if young Mavis, his mother, and Dorrice would accompany them. This proposal took Ben completely by surprise ; but Mr. Apthorp pleaded his point with his usual skill, and parried every objection which the other raised.

CHAPTER XX.

A LAST TALK.

IT was almost three months later, that Ben Mavis and Lenox Dare came out once more on the piazza for a walk. It was to be their last, for a long time. The next day Lenox was to leave Briarswild. It was a dreary November night. Its winds lashed the withered grasses, and moaned through leafless branches.

It seemed now to each but a day since they had their first walk here, in the June night, with the stars overhead, and the summer greenness around them; and now Lenox was going away, for only a year or two at farthest, her uncle said. But Ben remembered he had said a good deal the same thing when she went away before.

He listened to her talk now — to her regret at going away; to her longing to see the snows once more cover the hills that watched around Briarswild. She went back tenderly over all the memories of the summer — of the autumn, for Uncle Tom had carried his point. They had all gone on the trip of nearly a month among the mountains and to the sea-shore. Even Ben Mavis — despite certain drawbacks — had enjoyed it all.

Lenox suddenly stopped talking, her thoughts going to Dorrice Cropsey. The girl never had a suspicion that another had surprised her secret. Many trifles, light as air, had strengthened Lenox's conviction. After all, she reasoned, there was nothing surprising in the fact. It was, indeed, the most likely thing in the world to happen. Who could know the brave, manly, handsome young fellow, and not love him? But it never struck her as singular that she did not — in Dorrice's way, at least.

Lenox Dare was, at heart, a romantic woman. The secret she had surprised had a great interest for her. It gave Dorrice a new sacredness in her eyes. She felt a yearning pity for the girl, now she knew what lay at the heart of that young life. The more she reflected on it, the more she became satisfied that this azure-eyed, sweet-souled maiden was the one wife in the world for Ben Mavis. Where could he find such another? she asked herself. She was half-provoked at Ben's dullness in not blessing the kindly Fates which had brought such a woman to his side. She was actually jealous for Dorrice. She saw, too, that the girl had judged rightly. Ben had not the slightest notion of falling in love with her. He was really fond of her. But it was in much the same way that he would have been of his sister Janet. He was never tired of Dorrice's playful brightness, of her quaint, arch talk; he enjoyed the sight of that rosy, sparkling girlhood about the house. But it all ended there.

Dorrice's heart had given her true insight, Lenox thought. The truth lay in that bit of poetry. Ben saw the girl only in the common, every-day lights of household life.

"They are too close together," Lenox often said, musing about the pair, not dreaming how Ben Mavis had said the same of themselves.

Meanwhile, Lenox did her best for Dorrice. With a woman's endless tact, she drew out the girl's pretty ways of look, and speech, and manner. She always managed to have Dorrice in the foreground when Ben was by. She repeated the girl's speeches to him, praised her beauty, her sweetness, her artless nature. Ben listened and assented to all this, with a frank heartiness that half-amused, half-provoked Lenox.

As they walked around the piazza, in the silence and darkness, she was debating with herself whether she could, by any means, serve Dorrice? Would it be wisest to speak? She shrank from meddling with so delicate a matter; and yet — and yet — she was going away — there was nothing more she could do; and Dorrice's face would come up again, with the look in it she had seen that day, when she turned toward her from the open book.

At last she glanced up; she saw Ben's eyes shining on her through the darkness.

"What have you been thinking of all this time, Lenox?" he asked.

"Have I been silent so long! I was thinking of you, Ben."

"Of me, Lenox?"

"Yes; of something you said to me that night when we took our first walk here, after my return. I did not half like a speech you made then; I like it still less now."

"I cannot imagine what you mean, Lenox."

“ You said you were resolved never to marry.”

“ Did that vex you ?”

“ Just that. If you had been no more than twenty — if you were in the habit of saying what you did not mean, I should have thought nothing of such a speech. But I saw you were serious, and I cannot let you drift into old bachelorhood without making an effort to rescue you from so forlorn a fate. Ben,” speaking rapidly and eagerly now, like one who fears the ground she treads on ; “ I wish you would let me choose a wife for you !”

“ You choose a wife for me ! *You, Lenox !*”

“ *I, Ben.* Do you think anybody else could do it more wisely, with a tenderer thought for your happiness ?”

She spoke with a little hurt tone now.

“ Who would the woman be, Lenox ?”

She laid her hand on his ; they paused in their walk ; he bent his head to hear. Her courage almost failed her, she spoke the name in a little, fluttering whisper : “ Dorrice Cropsey !”

They began to walk again. He did not speak.

After she had waited awhile, she spoke again, saying all manner of tender and beautiful things of Dorrice Cropsey. It is doubtful how much young Mavis heard, but he was listening to the soft, vibrant voice, and thinking how soon it would be silent for him.

There was a terrible pang — a joy, too, that was like a pain, in that thought. It had sometimes seemed to Ben, that, if Lenox did not soon go away, he must leave Briarswild. There are burdens which the strongest man cannot always bear.

When she paused at last, he spoke: "Dorrice Cropsey is all you say; yet I do not think you would have me take a wife to please you, Lenox?"

"No, Ben. I could not ask that, but I hoped —" Lenox paused there, with a sudden dread lest she should betray Dorrice's secret.

The rain had now began to fall. A wet gust suddenly drove under the piazza. Lenox shivered a little. Then voices inside called to them. A great fire of maple and hickory was in full blaze up the black, cavern-throated old chimney. They were determined to keep Lenox's last night at Briarswild with warmth and cheer.

"How abominably selfish I must be to keep you out here alone with me this last evening!" said Ben, and his tone implied there was no more to be said.

"Poor little Dorrice!" thought Lenox, as they entered the house. "I meant it all for the best — but I am not sure — my speaking may have done you more harm than good!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

ROBERT BERESFORD mounted his horse in the chilly gloom of a November evening. The last glimmer of twilight had disappeared in the west. The friend, with whom he had been dining, stood at the gate.

“I hope you have some sort of weapon about you, in case of attack, Beresford?” he said.

“Nothing of the sort, Jack,” replied the other, as he wheeled his horse around. “We are not in Italy, and the woods about here are not the haunts of brigands.”

“But they are of tramps — a less picturesque variety of the genus, certainly. On the road between here and your house, are some lonely places — just the sort of ground for any skulking villain, who wouldn’t mind shooting you for the chance of the money you might have about you. You had better let me bring out my pistol.”

“No, thank you, Jack. It has come in my way, during the last dozen years, to deal with a good many desperate characters, but I never brought cold steel to enforce my arguments.”

“Well, have your own way. I know you have

nerve enough, old fellow, to face an army, single-handed. But when it comes to dealing with a highwayman, all the pluck in the world won't serve a man as well as a good revolver!"

"This savage talk might amaze me, Jack Leith, if I didn't know you were at bottom one of the softest-hearted fellows in the world! But I tell you assassins don't lurk in New England woods. I am not foolhardy; I shouldn't go about defenceless if I imagined I was running risks. Jack, dear old fellow," suddenly changing his tone, "this visit has done me good. I feel as though our talk had taken fifteen years off me. It has carried me back to our old tramps in Italy, and our winter in the Roman villa, and those rare old days in the Vatican galleries."

"I said then you were the best fellow in the world, Beresford. I hold my old opinion still."

The last speaker, as he stood by his friend's horse, showed a slender, medium-sized figure, and the outline of a thin, dark face, with pleasant, eager eyes. He and Beresford had been college chums, and had studied together at Rome. A strong friendship—the growth of years of intimacy—existed between the men. Jack Leith had won a name and a moderate fortune with his brush. On his return to America, three years before, he had purchased a pleasant little villa, half a dozen miles from his friend's residence. The two, who had so many tastes in common, beside the old friendship, to draw them together, saw each other frequently.

"I had rather you, than any living man should

say that, Jack Leith!" Beresford replied to his friend's remark. "Will you be over next week, and bring Gertrude with you, and the little girl? She won't find her old playmate there; but we will do our best to amuse her. You can imagine, Jack, it pulled at my heart to let Phil go away. But I knew a couple of years abroad now, would do more for him in the languages than ten, at a later period. So I compelled myself not to stand in his way; but I miss the young rogue every time I enter the house!"

"I can well believe that. If his absence would only drive you to your easel! Ah, Beresford to think of a fellow of your splendid promise turning Philistine!"

"But was it 'splendid promise,' Jack? There was the rub! If I had had no question in my own mind, be sure I should not, at the critical moment, have decided for the Philistine."

Jack Leith knew more than any other man of the circumstances which had at last inclined his friend to a business career. He had always regarded it as the most shameful waste of original power. In his secret soul he believed that, had he been at hand, when the decisive moment came, his influence would have turned the scale.

He was silent so long, thinking of all this, that Beresford added: "If a man does what seems his highest duty, he may be mistaken, but he cannot be remorseful."

"But you are a rich enough man, in all conscience, by this time. Why do you go on sacrificing to Mammon? What hinders you from returning to your first love?"

“That is easier said than done, as you would know if you had tried to serve two masters, and one was Art and the other a partnership in a great Iron Firm!”

“I should cut the partnership with a vengeance!”

“Perhaps not — such a good-hearted fellow as you are — if you saw that a great deal depended on your sticking to the helm — that if you let that go suddenly a good many lives and fortunes might go to wreck also. When a man has been in business for a decade, he is likely to find a thousand interests bound up with his own, and he can’t always bring himself to sacrifice others for his own pleasure.”

“He cannot, if the man happens to be — my old chum! But we won’t waste words. It always raises my fiend of a temper to think of what has gone to waste with you, Beresford!”

“Perhaps it won’t prove to be all waste when the great audit is made up.” And if there was a little sadness in the tones, there was something, too, that rung like victory. “Good-bye, Jack. You are a good fellow!”

“Good-bye, Beresford. God bless you!”

The two men grasped hands in a way that emphasized their last words, and then horse and rider dashed up the road.

It was three years since Robert Beresford had gone away, in the budding May-morning, to find his dead wife in the hollow, and his motherless boy sitting by her, with grave, puzzled eyes, and the excited crowd around them growing still as he came up.

Of the horror of that time, of the bitter grief that

followed, it is impossible to write. I cannot choose but think that over the blackest night of such a man's grief some stars of faith and hope must shine.

If the thought ever flashed across him, that his great sacrifice mattered now little to her for whose sake he had made it, it was pleasant to reflect that her tender feet had always kept the primrose paths. The fair, delicate woman had never faced any of the bitter weather of poverty while she walked by his side.

Yet, for months that followed his wife's death, it seemed to Robert Beresford that all incentive to work of any sort had vanished.

His fortune was now ample for his own purposes, but partly because his long-neglected gift took its own revenge, and the old visions — the joy and the beauty — did not revisit his imagination; and partly because his easel had such a cruelly tender association with that last talk before Stacey went away from him forever, he could not bring himself to take up a brush.

Perhaps it was well for him at this time, that a sudden financial crisis intervened. The senior partner had an attack of apoplexy, and was too broken to attend to business. Beresford's energies rallied to meet the new strain on them. The house, largely owing to his foresight and skill, weathered the storm, and when a time of comparative leisure came, the heart of his youth — for he was only a little past thirty-five — had rallied once more.

Life called to Robert Beresford — drew him with her own subtle influences on many sides. He began to feel the old hankering for palette and canvas; and

he executed some work in landscapes which his friends praised ; averring that he had not lost the old trick of firm drawing — the fine handling of color ; but the pictures afforded little satisfaction to the painter.

Had Robert Beresford followed his own inclinations, he would, probably, any day during the last three years, have retired from business. He remained in the firm for the reasons he had assigned to his friend, but he still looked forward to the time when his partnership should close, half wondering whether that event would make him a happier man, and half believing it, when he said to himself :

“ My nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”

Philip’s departure, to spend some time with his aunt in Germany, had cost his father’s heart the sharpest wrench it had known since the boy’s mother left him ; but he would not sacrifice Philip’s future to his own pleasure.

The stillness of the autumn night was almost oppressive. All the sounds of summer-life — the voices of insects, the movement of leaves, the whirring of light wings, had vanished. A breath of wind shivered occasionally through the bare branches. Overhead a few stars would glimmer doubtfully between gray, bulging masses of cloud, and then disappear. A wild, sad sky brooded that night over a bare, frost-smitten desolate earth.

Robert Beresford had chosen the shortest route home. It carried him through a mile of dense, lonely woods. He had just entered these, and was going at a smart gallop, when he suddenly drew his horse up ;

he had heard a cry. In a moment he heard it again. It was a little louder this time, perhaps a little nearer, but there was no mistaking it. It was a cry for help. It seemed half smothered at times, like the voice of one in mortal peril, and then it broke through the night — a wail of anguish and terror.

The sound evidently came from the right. The woods, pierced in every direction by footpaths, lay on the edge of the town, and when the rider entered them he had left the last farm-house half a mile behind him.

Robert Beresford did not pause for a second thought. All the man's generous instincts aroused, he dashed ahead at that cry of human need. He knew the ground perfectly. Dark and lonely as it seemed now, with the bare, black branches stretching weirdly over him, he had ridden that way when happy summers draped them with all the life and joy of leaves. In any case, the man's nerves were a stranger to fear. Had the place been utterly new to him he would have gone in search of that cry. He spurred his horse deeper into the thick shadows, then he drew up suddenly and sprung off, plunging into a little footpath on his right. Once or twice he heard the cry again. Each time it grew nearer.

There was a sudden trampling of heavy feet. Three figures sprung out of the darkness, and confronted him. He heard a sound of oaths, the click of a pistol. In an instant it was all clear to him. The cries for help had only been a ruse to decoy him into the woods. The wretches had succeeded too well. Robert Beresford took in the situation, saw his whole peril

in a flash. He stood there, unarmed and helpless, at the mercy of three desperate men, who probably had made up their minds to shoot him!

He was a brave man, as I said, but his heart gave one bound, and stood still. A sudden faintness went over him. He remembered afterward how he thought to himself: "It can only be death at the worst, and if it has come now, I will meet it like a man!"

Then he spoke, expecting that a shot would put an end to his words. The men were so close to him that he caught the evil glitter of their eyes in the darkness; he felt, rather than saw, the powerful, hulking figures.

"You want to rob me," he said. "It will be easy to do that. But you will make nothing by killing me."

His voice had just the same quiet key it had when he addressed some angry crowd of hands at the works. It would probably have had its effect now, had not the men been maddened by drink.

There was another outburst of oaths — a pistol fired by an unsteady hand, for the murderous aim missed the man standing there in the darkness. At that instant the clouds drifted apart, and a large, low moon shone through a thin, gray veil of mist. The pale light broke through some oak boughs, and outlined the heavy, slouching figures, huddled close together, and the form — taller and slenderer by contrast — of the man who stood there, awaiting his doom at the hands of a trio of desperate, drink-maddened villains.

The brightest glimmer of that pale, swift, vanishing moonlight suddenly touched Robert Beresford's

face. The next moment there was a cry — a sort of yell of recognition, amazement, horror! One of the men sprung forward and struck down the pistol of his comrade.

“You shall kill me first, you dog!” shouted a hoarse, frenzied voice, and a moment later it was yelling: “Run for your life, man, or these devils will have it!”

Quicker than thought Robert Beresford turned. The sudden bewilderment of the villains, at the defection of one of their number, had given him a chance. With a blind instinct he fled now, as a man can only flee when his life hangs on seconds. The darkness and his knowledge of the woods aided him. He heard the pistols again, the horrible oaths, the yells of baffled rage, the trampling of heavy feet, and he knew his pursuers were on his track. But those few moments had been everything in his favor. He darted from the footpath into the road, he leaped on his horse. The creature had been frightened by the firing, and, an instant later, would have rushed off without her rider. She dashed furiously ahead now. It was a life-and-death race through the bare, old woods, between the glimpses of the moon.

An hour later, Robert Beresford was in his library. He lay on the lounge to which he had dragged himself on his return. His strong nerves had had a terrible shock. He had faced the peril as only a brave man could, but the reaction had come, and he was terribly shaken by what had passed.

The scene in the woods had not occupied more than three minutes. The man saw that, when he looked

at his watch. His escape was almost a miracle. There could be no question of the villains' deadly intent. They must have been on the watch — have learned by some means that he would go through the woods that night. Their original purpose, no doubt, was to rob him; but drink had roused all their bad blood, and in their mood of savage frenzy they were bent on killing him.

One of the highwaymen had recognized him. There was no mistaking that cry. It came from the man's soul. What did it all mean? There were men — hardened, desperate — for whom Robert Beresford had done kind deeds — to whom he had spoken cheering, helpful words. Had one of these men caught sight of him, and remembered?

Then the man, lying on the lounge, and asking himself these questions, began to wonder whether it was not all a dream. The whole thing had been so sudden, so stunning! Had he dropped asleep and had a touch of nightmare?

Not quite sure, in his own mind, he attempted to rise from the lounge. Then a terrible pain shot through his right arm. His wrist was quite stiff. Every movement of his hand tortured him. Beresford remembered now what he had quite forgotten — that the foremost of the villains who rushed out of the dark, had dealt him a heavy blow with his pistol. Evidently the scene in the woods had not been a nightmare!

When the surgeon came to examine the wrist, he found some of the small bones broken. Beyond the present pain and inconvenience no serious harm had been done.

The next morning policemen searched the woods. They found nobody there. At the point where the tragic scene of the night before had occurred, the grass had been trampled by heavy feet, the underbrush broken and scattered. Several bullets lay among the leaves.

Before noon Jack Leith heard of the attack, and rode over in great alarm. He listened, with white lips, but almost without a word, to his friend's story. When all was told, he did not once say, "I was right, you see!" or, "You ought to have taken my pistol, Beresford!"

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER.

LESS than a year after Lenox Dare left Briars-wild, the sad tidings of Mrs. Mavis's death had crossed the sea. The cheery, active spirit long upheld the waning strength. The close of the bright, helpful life was almost painless.

"It will hurt Lenox," the mother said to her son in their last talk together, "because she was not with me at this time. Tell my little girl I charged her not to grieve. It was best so. I was growing an old woman, Ben, my boy, though you didn't see it. I don't fear the dying, now it is close to me; only I'm sorry for you, dear—you and Dorrice." And she turned to the tearful young face that had been bending over her bedside through all these days.

Some thought, which she did not speak, struck the sick woman at that moment. She lifted her hand feebly, and stroked the girl's. Then she laid those soft fingers in her son's palm.

"Be good to Dorrice!" she said.

He bowed his head; he could not speak at that moment. The next day he was head of the Mavis homestead.

Less than a month afterward Dorrice Cropsey had

a letter, in an unknown hand, from the West. Her brother — her last relative — was dead.

Young Mavis, coming on the girl suddenly, found her in the first passion of her grief.

“I am all alone — all alone in the world!” she said, as he entered the room.

It was a cry of hopeless agony. It went to his heart. She stood before him, holding out the letter, her eyes strained, the roses withered out of her cheeks.

Ben half led, half carried her to a seat. He took the letter from her cold hands and glanced over the contents. His own heart, almost broken with its recent grief, yearned over the stricken girl.

“I will take care of you, Dorrice,” he said, and his manly tones were soft with pity. “You shall never be alone in the world; you shall have a home here, so long as I live.”

Did she hear what he said? He could not tell. He only saw the wild, tearless eyes staring at him. In a moment she broke out again with that wailing cry: “I cannot stay here. I was going to John. But he is dead, and now there is no place for me in the world!”

Those words — the outbreak of agony and despair — let in a sudden light on Ben Mavis. He had never given a thought to Dorrice’s going away; he had taken for granted that she would stay on as before; but he saw now the impossibility of her doing so. Her own delicacy had warned the girl. Some intimate friends of the family had, for the young people’s sake, remained at the homestead after Mrs. Mavis’s

death. They would leave in the course of the next month. Without consulting Ben, Dorrice had made up her mind to go away at the same time. She intended to join her brother. Under that fair, girlish guise, was a brave heart, and a spirit that would nerve itself to any duty. But the strong arm on which she could have leaned, had suddenly failed. In all the wide world there was no shelter for the white, smitten creature before whom Ben Mavis stood that morning, with unutterable sorrow in his face.

Of a sudden the look flashed across him which he had seen in his mother's eyes, the day before she left him. He was overwhelmed with grief at the time, and it had no meaning for him, beyond what lay on the surface. He had not recalled it since ; but he knew now what must have been in his mother's dying thought. It had been in Lenox Dare's, when they walked together that last night, in the November gloom.

Dorrice was hardly aware of his presence. She let him lead her to the lounge, not knowing what he did. And now she sat there, bolt upright, her wild eyes staring into vacancy. If he could only bring some life into that marble face !

But he must be sure of himself, before he spoke. He saw, with his clear, strong sense, how all the future of both might hang on the next few minutes. He would act wisely for Dorrice, for himself. He thought of all she had been at Briarswild — of her sunny nature, her winsome ways. He thought what a double desolation would fall upon the house when the bright presence and the sweet young face should

have vanished from the silent old rooms. He remembered Dorrice's devotion to his mother through those last days, whose darkness still hung about him — his mother who had died, wishing that Dorrice might take the place she left vacant in her home — in her son's heart.

Ben Mavis thought, too, in that hour of the woman across the sea — of all she had been — of all she could never be to him.

“But if another woman, fair and sweet, and bowed to the earth by her sorrow, would lift up her head once more — if he could persuade her to come and sit by the lonely hearthstone of his life, and be a blessed, consoling presence there —” His heart thrilled at that thought. All his strong, generous manhood yearned toward the maiden. In her weakness and grief she grew dear and sacred in his eyes.

Ben Mavis had walked across the room for three or four minutes. But there are crises, when heart and brain live years in moments.

Young Mavis turned at last and came back to Dorrice. He had made up his mind.

“Dorrice,” he said, taking her cold hands in his, and looking into her bright, tearless eyes, “the home here is not more mine than yours. I cannot let you go away into the wide, lonely world. What would you do there, you little, soft, fragrant flower of a woman? You have been my greatest help and comfort through all my bitter grief, though I have never told you so — never even thanked you. And now your trouble has come, it is my turn. Will you let me try

what I can do for you? Will you give me the right to share your sorrows? I will be good to you, Dorrice. I promise you that, as I promised my dying mother. Let me see you look up; let me hear you say we will stay together—we will comfort each other!”

The suddenness of her grief had almost stunned her. She stared at him with bewildered eyes. He must make his meaning quite clear to her.

“I ask you, Dorrice Cropsey, to stay here as my wife!”

At those words she rose to her feet. The slow color came into her pallid cheeks. It took her a minute or two to realize the question which his lips had asked, and which his eyes, still holding hers, repeated.

But the joy that came so swift on grief, was half a pain. She did not speak. A look answered him—such a look as only once in a lifetime, heart and soul can flash into a human face. It told Ben Mavis what he had never dreamed before; what Lenox had learned long ago; what his mother’s dying eyes had caught a glimpse of.

“My poor little girl!” he said, and he put his arms around Dorrice.

All this had happened before Lenox had been a year from Briarswild. Mr. Apthorp found the settlement of his affairs in England a more complex matter than he had anticipated. Had less been at stake for his niece, he would have left the business in the hands of his lawyer’s, and saved himself a good deal of wear and tear at this time.

The tastes of the two were not extravagant; but

their life abroad had made heavy draughts on the fortune which Mr. Apthorp had brought from the East Indies. All this, however, he had sedulously kept from Lenox. He had his own reasons now for wishing to place his property in secure and easily managed investments. His niece did not imagine with what almost boyish eagerness her uncle looked forward to their return to his native land, or how keen was his disappointment as he found his hope delayed from month to month. He had a slight cough, too, and they had twice to winter in the south of France.

The tidings of Mrs. Mavis's death could not fail to overshadow Lenox's last stay abroad. She had lost the only mother she had ever known.

A little later, came tidings from Briarswild of the engagement of the young people, and of their marriage, a month later.

Nobody ever knew with just what feelings Ben Mavis laid down Lenox's letter of tender, joyful congratulations. It had been his fate — perhaps his misfortune — that he loved her in a way that he never could love another woman. But in all the years to come he never doubted that he was a happier man with Dorrice Cropsey for his wife than he ever could have been with Lenox Dare.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THEIR OWN HOME.

IT was almost two years since Lenox and her uncle went away, the second time, from Briarswild. They were in their own land now, under their own roof-tree. They had been there less than a month; yet it had begun already to seem home to them, in a way which no other place could—not even the Mavis homestead.

The two had returned a little before midsummer. They stayed awhile at Briarswild. The place was vacant, the voice silent, for which Lenox had always looked and listened first. But the old home was full of a new happiness. Ben and Dorrice had not been married a year. How fitly she took her place as the young mistress of the fair old homestead! The glow in her cheeks, rivaled her maiden bloom. The gladness in her eyes outshone the girlish archness. She was one of those women whose mission it is to make home blessed and happy. She reminded one of that beautiful old myth of Vesta. It seemed as though the hearth goddess must have smiled on Dorrice from her birth—must have blessed her with all household gifts and graces. Ben, watching his young wife's face as it shone about the house, or sparkled and

dimpled by his side, said to himself: "What should I do without you, Dorrice?" Sometimes he repeated the thought to her.

And Dorrice would answer, with a little quiver in her voice: "What should I have done without you, Ben?"

An English gentleman, who had lived for several years in America, crossed the sea with Mr. Apthorp and his niece. He was returning to his family, from whom he had been called by the sudden death of a relative. They would all go back to their native land, after he had disposed of a home which he had built during his residence in the States. The house was an English cottage. Its owner described it as a bit of picturesque, rural architecture, in the midst of some pretty landscape gardening.

It appeared that this house stood less than a mile from the beach, and within two of the town where Mr. Apthorp was born. For the last years he had been looking forward to settling down under his own vine and fig-tree as the consummation of all his earthly hopes and ambitions. He was so attracted by his fellow-passenger's description of his home, that he agreed to visit it within a fortnight after they should have set foot in America.

All this time Lenox was kept in profound ignorance of her uncle's plans. She rallied him occasionally on his hobnobbing with the Englishman. She was, like everybody else, quite in the dark when her uncle, the week after his return, made some excuse for leaving Briarswild.

He found the Englishman's place all that its owner

had described. Indeed, the house and the grounds were so well adapted to Mr. Apthorp's tastes and requirements that, as he strolled over them, he half fancied some kindly genii must have created the whole for his satisfaction.

The day after he visited the place the bargain which made him its owner was concluded.

Tom Apthorp afterwards planned a surprise for his niece. During the remainder of the summer, which she passed at Briarswild, he never alluded to his new purchase. One day, early in the autumn, when they had come for a brief visit to Boston, he drove her a few miles out of the city, along the pleasant beach-roads, and at last brought her to the cottage-grounds. Lenox followed him, surprised and curious, when he insisted on her alighting at the door. He led her into the house. She had no sooner crossed the threshold — wondering what he was about — whom they were going to see in this pretty bower, among green terraces, and lovely foregrounds of lawn and shrubbery — when he put the keys into her hands, and saluted her as the mistress of the castle.

That was six weeks ago. Since that day the two had lived under this roof. From the first, it had been simply a “coming home” to them.

The house had been built after the pattern of an English country-house. Its color was a pale gray, and it stood, broad and rather low, among the honeysuckles, the ivies, and creepers, that half covered it. The grounds were not extensive, but sloping terraces, and twisting paths, and skillful grouping of shrubberies,

made the impression of wide areas and winding vistas. Pretty rustic-work was scattered about. The flowerbeds and knolls were a mass of gorgeous, late summer bloom. From the upper windows were fascinating glimpses of the sea, two miles away.

Inside nothing seemed wanting. The former owners had gathered into their sea-side nest, as they loved to call it, everything that could add to its home coziness or comfort. The rooms were few, and large and sunny, with all sorts of bright little nooks opening out of them. The furnishings were simple, but in perfect taste; the cool, gray tones brightened everywhere with flecks of color; with borderings of blue, or rose, or carmine.

It was no stately home to which Tom Apthorp had, at the end of their wanderings, brought his niece. His means would not admit of his doing that; his tastes had never inclined to splendor. But it was to her an idyllic spot — this gray nookery, hedged in green — where she could listen to the voices of the sea in stormy weather, and where an atmosphere charmed with home rest and happiness surrounded her.

They hung the walls with their own pictures and engravings. There was ancient china, there were all sorts of lovely and curious things — gathered in their long life abroad — to arrange about the rooms. Lenox had a woman's delight in this sort of work. It was an utterly new sensation to find herself the mistress of her own house.

Her uncle, watching her with quiet enjoyment, as she moved about the rooms, arranging the draperies,

disposing her treasures, would say : " How naturally and gracefully you do it, my dear ! One would suppose you had been at this sort of thing all your life. Are you a born housekeeper, after all ? "

And Lenox would laugh happily and say : " It is only an instinct, Uncle Tom. All women have it. I never had a fair chance at indulging mine before. "

And now the two sat together one evening, in the last of October, just six weeks after Lenox had first crossed the threshold. The windows were open ; the night was warm, as though it lingered on the skirts of summer. The Carnival of the autumn had begun, and the coppices and woods and roadsides were ablaze with color. The land held its brief day of splendor as though no winter and no north wind, a little way off, were biding their time. A low, reddish moon looked in through the clumps of evergreens. A dim light burned in the corner of the wide, rather low-studded sitting-room. Its predominant crimson made it the brightest room in the house. Its new owner said that it always made him think of a great red jewel. He liked to fancy how all that warm color would flame against the northern winter. The two always came here to pass their evenings. Its lounges, its easy chairs and all its graceful furnishings, made it seem like the very heart of the dainty home.

Lenox, seated a little way from her uncle, wore a white dress that night. When the evergreens stirred, the moonlight glimmered in her hair, or over the hands lying idly in her lap. In the dim light she made a central radiance. In the silence her uncle watched her.

“Uncle Tom,” she said, speaking her thought at last, “can you conceive of two happier human beings than you and I are to-night?”

“If there should be, you and I would not envy them, Lenox.”

“Envy them? When I can look out on that big, jostling, Vanity-Fair of a world, from such a little Paradise as this!”

“I like to hear my little girl talk in that fashion — to know she is so happy!”

“You are the dear magician, Uncle Tom, who has made my good fortunes. I am only half afraid that I shall awake some morning and find that house and grounds were only a bit of enchantment — that the whole has vanished into thin air!”

He laughed. “You may dismiss all thoughts of that sort, my dear. I have given the foundations a thorough examination. They are solid English work. They will last a couple of centuries.”

“Then they will serve more purposes than ours. But you cannot be surprised that the whole thing is a little suggestive of Prospero and his broken staff, and drowned book. Remember how you brought me here — what a surprise it all was! It was not in the natural order of things. It had more the air of romance and of magic than of common daylight; and yet —” She paused there.

“It struck me just then,” she continued, in a slightly lower tone, “that all the best things in my life had come in this way — with an air of the marvellous about them. *You* were a great surprise to me, Uncle Tom.”

"I have not the least doubt of that my dear!"

Something in his tone made her regret her last remark.

"Such a great, blessed, unutterable surprise!" she added, laying her hand on his own.

He held it a moment before he spoke.

"We have put into a snug little harbor, after our wanderings, Lenox. I have a curious feeling about it, too. Half the time I forget that I am an old man. I walk among these scenes, and ramble about the rocks and shore off there, and am just a careless, merry-hearted boy again. I can understand now the feeling which brings a man to end his days where he began them."

This last remark gave Lenox a vague uneasiness.

"How glad I am," she said, "that you and I are come to anchor, as you call it, on the spot where you and dear mamma were born! What a fresh interest and fascination your stories will have for me now that I can stand in the very places where they all happened! We will watch the summers in, and the winters out, in this fairy bower! I shall never want to leave it, except to visit dear old Briars-wild."

"Summers and winters!" repeated her uncle to himself. "I used to talk of them in that fashion, and they seemed an infinite procession to me."

"Why should they seem anything else now?" asked Lenox, in a little impatient tone.

"My dear," he answered, "do you know that I am an old man?"

"I know that there is nothing that exasperates

me so much as having you call yourself one! There isn't the slightest suggestion of old age about you."

"What, not with my gray poll and snowy beard!" he said, gayly. "Don't you see I might sit for a picture of old Time with his scythe?"

She laughed, resolved to treat this remark as a jest.

"Twenty years from this time—not eight, as you once said to me, Uncle Tom—I will answer your question. But I don't want to talk of a remote future. I am in love with the present—with life and happiness to-night."

The man gazed at the glowing speaker, as she sat before him with that witchery of moonlight in her hair.

"Life and happiness are good," he answered. "I cannot find it in my heart to say of them to-night what the wisest of men once did, 'This also is vanity!'"

"Uncle Tom," said Lenox, in a tone of decided irritation, "I do believe you are half an old Greek at bottom. We are so happy to-night you fear lest the gods should envy us, and you look serious, and make these solemn reflections, in order to placate them."

"No, Lenox, it is not Greek superstition—it is an old man's insight, this time."

"There it goes again! Uncle Tom, why will you cling so obstinately to this fiction of your old age?"

"Is it wholly a fiction, Lenox, when I am a good deal past sixty? I have at least reached the point where, as Dante says,

' Each behooves
To lower sails, and gather in the lines? ' "

"Sixty is a mere bagatelle!" replied Lenox. "Colonel Marvell was more than twenty years older than you are, and I never remember his calling himself an old man."

"A man's years are not always the test of his age. The Apthorps are not a long-lived race. You may hold out better, Lenox. You have a good deal of the old Dare stock in you."

As he made this remark, Lenox turned suddenly and looked at her uncle. Was it the flickering moonlight which gave him that thin, shadowy look? It struck her now for the first time.

"Uncle Tom," she asked, suddenly, "are you feeling quite well?"

"Tolerably so; only a good deal of the old spring has gone out of me. That long illness in India is at the bottom of it. I have held out bravely through all these years; but I never quite got over the terrible shaking of that time."

Lenox listened, with a shadow stealing over her joyous mood. Twice in her life the cold finger of death had touched her heart. Once, when a little child, she saw Colonel Marvell lying before her with his still, white face; and again when the mournful tidings from Briarswild crossed the sea. The one sadness that had underlaid these happy weeks had been the thought that Mrs. Mavis's pleased eyes could never glance about these rooms—could never follow her darling with loving pride about her new home.

"Uncle Tom," said Lenox, coming over suddenly and laying her hands on his shoulders with the old

gesture, which still made him think of a dove's white wings settling there, "have you been to see a doctor of late?"

"Yes, my dear."

"When was it?"

"Before we left England."

"Did he say anything — O, Uncle Tom — I am afraid to ask!"

"You will not be so weak as that, my child. There is nothing startling to tell, either. The doctor only said — what I knew before — that the old life in India, and the sickness with which it closed, had strained the timbers a good deal — in plain English, that I must take care of myself."

"Uncle Tom," burst out Lenox, as a cold fear touched her heart, "if you were to leave me, I should be all alone in the world. I could not live if you should —" She stopped there.

"Say it out bravely, my darling — if I should die! We will not be afraid of a word. And in any case I may outlive you — you, sitting there in the flower of a womanhood whose glowing bloom it seems no frosts of time can ever touch."

"But if you should go first — if I should be left here all alone!" and she clung to him and shivered.

"And if I went last, what should I do without my little girl? But when our turn comes — yours or mine — I hope the one who is left on the hither shore will have grace and courage to say, 'It will be but a little while. It is the will of God.'"

She had thrown herself on an ottoman at his feet, and laid her cheek on his knee.

“Now hold up your head, my dear, and don’t let me see you a shade less glad, because I am not quite as spry as I was forty years ago.”

In all these ways he tried to comfort her—to soothe her fears. He partly succeeded. But, looking back afterwards, Lenox knew that the shadow which had fallen across the threshold that night had never quite vanished from it.

The next week the Mavises came. Happy times followed their advent. The soft, pensive loveliness of the Indian summer hung long that year around the New England coast. Mr. Apthorp brightened wonderfully at this time. It was all owing to his native air, he insisted. He was never tired of escorting the young people about the country, and among the scenes of his boyhood. In the evenings they would gather in the sitting-room, and while the falling leaves made a melancholy rustle outside he would fascinate his little audience with stories, more delightful, his niece thought, than those with which he used to charm them when he first came to Briarswild.

The visitors were almost as pleased with the new home as Lenox herself.

“How perfectly it all suits you!” Ben would say, with something unfathomable in the gaze that followed her moving about in her new *role* of hostess.

“What a noble man Ben was—what a sweet woman Dorrice!” Lenox was always thinking to herself as she watched the pair. “How perfectly they suited each other!”

A great happiness shone under the long-fringed lashes of Dorrice’s azure eyes. She had told Lenox, long before the story of their sudden betrothal.

“Such a night as that was!” she said. “Such a morning as broke into it!”

One day, when Dorrice had been amusing her husband and Lenox with all manner of quaint, arch speeches, she suddenly glided off on some errand, leaving the pair alone. Lenox noticed the tender glance with which Ben followed the retreating figure. Then he turned and met Lenox’s eyes. She laid her hand on his.

“I was right, Ben,” she said. “Dorrice was the one woman in the world for you!”

He knew she was alluding to her talk the night before she went away from Briarswild.

“Yes, I think she was, Lenox,” he answered.

But though the two women were always talking about him, Lenox never told Dorrice of the secret she had surprised one day. And in her husband’s heart there was one hidden door to which Dorrice Mavis never had the key.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALONE.

THE Mavises stayed twice as long as they had intended. Just after they left the first snows came. Mr. Apthorp had been dreading these a little, not for his own sake, but for his neice's, after all her years of summers; but she looked out on the

“Beauty o’ersnowed and bareness everywhere,”

from her warm, bright-colored nest, and was as happy as any bird that would sing the next June in.

Old friends and neighbors of the Apthorps, who still lived in the vicinity, came to see them. They often had guests from the city, only twelve miles away. But the two, with all their social instincts, could not be drawn away from their own roof-tree that winter. Was it altogether because they were so happy as to have no longing for the great world outside, or because, as Lenox would have said, Uncle Tom was not quite strong this winter?

She was forced at last to admit this to herself. She hung about him with an anxiety pathetic to those who understood it. But she did not see, as strangers did, how his step grew a little slower, and the lines in his thin face sharper day by day. A little “hec-

toring" cough, that set in during the autumn, got deeper and hoarser; and when March came blustering in, with wild skies and bitter winds, Uncle Tom could barely crawl down stairs to the grate fire, by which he sat all day. He was still quite his old self, talking and jesting at times, even about his turning into such a mollycoddle; but there was a look in his eyes, when they followed Lenox, which he took good care she should never see. He let her cheat her heart by inventing all sorts of slight causes for his illness — perhaps he tried at times, for her sake, to deceive himself.

"This horrible climate keeps up your cough, Uncle Tom!" she would say, when there was no longer any disguising the truth. "Of course it was madness for you to think of weathering one of these New England winters, after your twenty years in India. We must spend our next winter in Florida."

"I believe the climate is at the bottom of it all," he sometimes answered. "Evidently it is too rough a coast for my old bones."

No doubt he partly made himself believe it, but after a while he ceased to say that.

One evening, in the last of March, she brought him the newspaper. He had been unusually feeble for several days. This one he had spent on the lounge, listening, when he was not talking with Lenox, to the muffled thunder of the waves. A high wind, which was blowing carried the sound far in shore.

"I like to hear it," he said to Lenox, in the morning. "The boom of the tide brings such a flood of old memories with it."

To-night, when she handed him the paper, he waived it aside.

"No, thank you," he said. "I don't feel like reading just now. Sit down here, Lenox, and let us have a talk together."

She threw herself on the low ottoman, by the great easy-chair, in which he was reclining. In all her talk, she had treated his illness as a kind of jest. That had hurt him more than any tears, because he knew what unacknowledged ache and fear lay under the lightness.

"We are on the edge of April, Uncle Tom," she said. "We shall have milder weather now, and you will soon be out again."

"Lenox," said her uncle, softly, but very gravely, "the climate is not the trouble with me!"

"Don't say it is anything worse than that, Uncle Tom!" she cried, in a voice which made it doubly hard for him to say something which he had been all that day making up his mind must be said.

"Lenox," he asked, after a little pause, "do I look like a man who is going to get well with a little milder weather?"

She turned, without a word, and looked at him. It seemed as though something compelled her. She saw the white head, lying against the crimson of the easy-chair; she saw the sharpened features, the gray shadows on the face, the bright, sunken eyes looking at her with unutterable love and pity. As she gazed, her lips grew pale. She stared on with a kind of fascinated terror, while the truth, from which heart and brain recoiled, forced itself upon her.

“O Uncle Tom — Uncle Tom!” It was a cry of exceeding agony.

His hand was on her head, his tender, restraining voice in her ears.

“Is that the way to take it, Lenox? the way for *my* sake?”

She stared about the room, like a creature driven to bay. Cold waves from the sea of death seemed to roll in upon her.

“It will kill me, Uncle Tom,” she cried out, in sharp, broken tones; “it will kill me to be left without you!”

“I know it seems like that now; but if God has willed that you should live, Lenox — if He has something in His world that cannot be done without you —”

She burst into a terrible sobbing. She was not given to weeping; but now a tempest shook the very roots of her being. She tried several times to speak, but always ended in a sharp cry: “My heart will break! It will break!”

Her uncle did his best, with soothing words and soft reproofs, to calm her. At last she grew more quiet, and sat at his feet, pale and still, with the cold at her heart.

“I had expected better things of my little girl,” he said. “If she fails me like this, I cannot say — what I have on my mind to-night.”

“But you may get well, after all, Uncle Tom;” clutching wildly at a hope which her heart yet belied.

He shook his head. “No, Lenox; let us not try

to deceive ourselves. The end may not be so near as I sometimes think ; but — it is coming !”

She looked in his face — and she knew.

“I should not mind, Lenox,” he went on, in a little while, “if it were not for leaving you all alone. I feel a good deal as Charles Kingsley, about ‘kindly death’s setting one off on a new start somewhere else.’ I see where I haven’t made the best of my chances here.”

“Think what you have made me — what you have been to me, Uncle Tom !”

“I shall be glad to tell your mother — my poor Evelyn — if I see her first, how you said that. I shall have to confess to a long, terrible neglect, Lenox !”

“Don’t, Uncle Tom, don’t !”

In this way the talk he had been dreading, opened. It went on for hours ; so that it would be quite impossible to write all that was said that night. Into the pauses of the talk, came the clamor of the wind — the far-off voices of the sea. The soft light shone upon the white, sharpened face of the man, on the snowy hair and the glittering beard, and on the beautiful head of the woman at his feet.

“I might have put this talk off until another time, Lenox,” said her uncle. “This old hulk of mine may hold out through a good many storms yet ; but I have some things to say while my mind is quite clear. You would not want me to wait for dread of hurting you, and then feel it was too late ?”

Her head moved a little in answer.

He began then, quite steadily and calmly, to speak

of her future without him. His whole talk showed how carefully he had forestalled everything; how all his plans had been made—even to the smallest details—with the nicest regard to the ease and comfort, the needs and tastes he understood so thoroughly.

“I am sure you will like best to live on here, Lenox, in the home where you and I have passed these happy months—it would be pleasanter now than to go back—even to Briarswild?”

She answered him with a glance.

“I shall not leave you a rich woman, Lenox, but you will have a sure income of a few thousands. And this will keep you very comfortably, with the two or three servants you will want to carry on the house. Should you require a man’s counsel or help—you will always have young Mavis to rely on—a better friend than most brothers.”

He went over all the details of her life, dwelling upon each in a way that showed how his wisdom and thoughtful care had provided for every emergency.

And afterward he said some tender, solemn words which she who heard will remember longest of all. “I know how it seems to you now, my darling. You think it will be too hard to bear—that it must kill you, too! I know your heart will be cruelly torn, and that it must have its own way for a while, but I charge you, when I am gone, not to grieve for me long and hopelessly. Open all the doors of your soul. Let all the life and beauty of the world, where God holds you back for awhile—at the farthest it can only be a little while—draw you softly, com-

fort you tenderly! I have a feeling, too, that there is some work for you to do yet in the world — that somebody may need you; somebody for whose sake you will be glad that you lived, when I went away and left you! And when you are happy, you will look back and remember this talk, and say, ‘Uncle Tom was right!’”

This was a part — only a very small part — of all that he said to Lenox that night; and in all the pauses of his talk she heard the cries of the wind outside — the distant voices of the sea. She heard them always, when she remembered that night, and how she sat there, silent and stunned, and listened until it was long past midnight.

In the weeks that followed Uncle Tom rallied a good deal. He moved once more about the house, with a halting step, it is true, but he was quite his old self, full of interest in what was going on around him, telling his stories, and having his jests with Lenox.

Her heart rallied, too. The cold shadow that had fallen on her soul grew lighter. She hoped, after all, that Uncle Tom was not going to die. She still clung to her old fancy that the summer, which was slowly coming that way, would work wonders for him. She never alluded to the talk they had together that night. Neither did her uncle.

One morning, early in May, she went out for a walk. She was gone longer than she expected. The blue haze upon the distant hills, the soft, pink blush of the budding maples, the tender green which was yet hardly more than a dreamy mist about the boughs,

and a nameless life and thrill and scent in the air drew her on into quiet old roads and sunny lanes.

She came home at last, with a glow in her cheeks, a gladness in her eyes. She went straight to the sitting-room. Her uncle was in his easy-chair, just as she had left him.

Lenox had found a small robin's nest in a lane, where the winds had shaken it from the trees. In a sunny corner of a little coppice, half a mile away, she had come across a few blossoms of trailing arbutus, and some ferns that had begun to push their first plumes of delicate green through the dead leaves. She had placed the soft, pink-white of the blossoms against the feathery-green of the ferns, and laid the whole in the little hollow of the bird's nest.

She came toward the easy-chair.

"Uncle Tom," she cried, "see what I have brought you! The first blossom of the new year in a nest of the old!"

But he did not move to the glad cadence of her voice.

He sat with his back toward her. She came closer to him.

"Uncle Tom, are you asleep?" she asked softly, and she leaned over him.

He had "gone to sleep!" But it was a sleep from which no cry of love or agony could awake him!

CHAPTER XXV.

JESSIE DAWES.

HAPPY birds were singing in full-leaved trees the songs of another June. The land was flushed with roses. The scent of all the flowering things was in the summer air.

Lenox Dare stood on the side porch that morning, and drank in with delighted senses all the life, and song, and beauty about her. It was now more than two months since she had come in, joyous and glowing, from her walk, to meet that Spectre whose noiseless footfall had crossed the threshold in her absence. Others had told her of one piercing cry — of finding her, a little later, clinging in frozen, tearless agony to the dead man !

These last months seem sometimes like a day ; sometimes like years. The hours of agony — the cruel heartache — the sense of loss and loneliness — the feeling that all life's good had vanished — that nothing remained worth caring for — oh, my reader, you who know what these mean, need not be told how she sorrowed for her dead !

Yet, on the whole, she had been surprised to find herself so calm — so happy, even, at times. Her nature was sound to the core. She could not be in

the world and not be, as she had said, "in love with life." Her soul turned as naturally to light and hope as larks to the skies, as flowers to the sun.

After her uncle had been laid in the old Apthorp burial place, Ben Mavis, who had hurried to Lenox, wanted to take her back with him to Briarswild. But he could not move her.

"I must learn to live here without him," she said. "It was his own plan. I see now it was the best, the wisest. In a little while I shall get used to it. But if I should go back with you now, Ben, to the dear old home, I should never be able to return!"

"It will be a great disappointment to Dorrice!" he said.

"Tell her to have patience with me; I will come after a little while," Lenox answered.

So he went home without her.

She lived on in the old way, just as though Uncle Tom were only gone for a little while. She constantly reverted to his wishes, and endeavored to carry out all his plans as though he were alive. Indeed, she often said to herself: "I can't make it *seem* that Uncle Tom is dead!"

She said it to herself now, as she stood on the porch. Even the thought of that fresh mound, which the June's soft fingers were clothing with green, could not fill her soul with gloom. She remembered how often Uncle Tom had said that the fact of this world was, to him, satisfying evidence of the existence of another. He was somewhere, she believed, in a life, larger, fuller in every sense, than even this fullness of joy and beauty about her.

While she was standing there, she caught sight of the gardener among the tulip-beds. That reminded her of her resolve to take a drive that morning. It would be the first since Uncle Tom left her. She had put it off from day to day. This morning the going alone did not seem so hard. She went down the walk to tell Donald to have her pony-carriage at the gate within half an hour.

Donald Brae was a big-framed, stalwart Scotchman who had remained on the place when the first owner sold it. Mr. Apthorp had taken a liking to the man, and made him promise he would never leave his niece's service. Donald was a thorough Scotchman, capable and trustworthy, with the native shrewdness and dry humor of his race. He had married a little, buxom, good-tempered, Scotch lassie, who now, with the assistance of a single maid, managed affairs indoors as perfectly as her husband did those outside.

Donald's tall, large-boned figure lifted itself from the tulip-beds, as Lenox approached, and stood still before the sea of gorgeous, variegated color. The man had been cutting tulips and arranging them in a magnificent bouquet.

"They're for the new hospital, ma'am," he said, speaking English with a decided Scotch accent. "There's a young girl lyin' there, the doctor says, who can't hold out many days. She's had a rough time of it in life; I thought maybe the sight o' the flowers might cheer her a bit. The doctor promised to stop for them when he drove by ag'in. It's hard to go out o' the world, with no one of your own kith and kin to stand by, and say a kind word to you."

Lenox thought of her childhood, and how all that might have been her own story.

“Poor child,” speaking half to herself. “It *is* a hard fate, as you say, Donald.”

The Scotchman looked at his young mistress. The first time he saw her she had seemed to him — so he told his wife afterward — the most beautiful thing he had ever set eyes on. He had grown to regard her now with that sort of loyal devotion which some old fighting Highlander, among his ancestors, must have felt for the chief of his clan.

“Burns has some lines, ma’am,” he said, “that are al’ays singin’ in my brain. Poetry does that after it’s got into a man’s heart first.”

“What are the lines, Donald?” asked Lenox, looking into the shrewd, wrinkled face of the gardener.

Donald repeated them as none but a Scotchman could — with the broad vowels, the real northern *burr* :

“It’s hardly in a body’s power
To keep at times frae being sour
To see how things are shared!”

As Lenox listened, the old chamber at the turn-pike, where she first read those words, came up to her. Other memories could not fail to crowd thick on that one — memories of the two days when heart and brain had been haunted by a double horror — a dread for herself — an agonizing memory of the great poet whose genius and whose death are alike Scotland’s glory and her shame.

She turned away without a word. Donald watched her, with sorrowful eyes, as she went up the walk.

Perhaps his talk, bringing back scenes of which she had never been able to think quite calmly, was the cause of her change of mood. All its joyousness seemed to vanish in a moment. Her heart gave a sudden cry for its dead. She looked about her, and thought how Uncle Tom would have rejoiced in this perfect morning. Why was he not here to-day? Why could he not have lived a little longer? What was all the pomp of the summer to her now? She could not enter the house, carrying such thoughts, such pain, with her. She must get away from herself — into some other life, some other sorrow. She remembered what Donald had been saying. She turned and went back to the tulip-beds.

“Donald,” she said, “I will take those flowers to the hospital.”

In less than two hours from that time, Lenox drew up before the new building. It was a little more than three miles from her own home, and was a plain, rather bare-looking structure, of red brick. Only a few of the rooms had yet been opened to patients. One of the nurses took Lenox to the sick girl's chamber — a small room, which opened out of a great, bare, unfurnished apartment. The girl was on a low bed, near the open window. Everything was plain and comfortable about her, but for all that, it seemed a bare, lonely place for one to lie and watch, day after day, the sunshine creep along the gray walls.

The nurse left Lenox at the door. She entered so softly that the girl caught no sound. The first thing she heard was a voice at her bedside, saying: “My dear, I have brought you some flowers this morning.”

The next moment Donald's great bouquet lay on the white coverlet.

At that sight the girl feebly lifted her head. She gave a little cry ; she reached out a pair of thin hands, and held them over the flowers ; her hungry gaze devoured the heap of bright, varied colors. The dews still sparkled in the bells of crimson and gold.

"They are tulips !" she cried, in a voice of amazed delight. "They used to grow in Grandma's front yard."

While she spoke, Lenox's glance had taken in the small head, with the mass of bright young hair, the sharpened features, the blue-veined skin, the dark, hollow eyes that burned with preternatural brightness.

The sick girl turned now and gazed at her visitor. In her delight over the tulips she had forgotten the presence there. She saw the beautiful face at her bedside. She saw the look of pitying tenderness in the great brown eyes — the smile on the lovely, unsteady lips. She had been thoroughly taken by surprise. Her mind was a good deal shaken, too, by weakness and suffering. That cloud of gorgeous color had fallen so softly, that beautiful face had appeared at her bedside so suddenly, that she half-fancied there must be something supernatural about it !

Could the old stories about angels be true, after all, and had one of them appeared at her bedside ?

At that thought the hectic deepened in the hollow cheeks. She gazed at her visitor with bright, awe-struck eyes.

"Who are you ?" she asked, under her breath.

"Somebody who has come to bring you these flowers, my child, and tell you how sorry she is to find you lying here sick — somebody who is ready to do anything in the world for your comfort or pleasure. My dear little girl, I hope you are glad to see me!"

The last words wavered a little, for the hectic glow, the sharpened face under the shadow of its dark hair, the bright, solemn gaze went to Lenox's heart.

"Yes, I *am* glad." The speaker's eyes went wistfully from the flowers to the face that had a greater charm for her. "You are just — a lady?"

"Why do you ask that — what do you take me to be?"

Lenox had drawn a chair to the bedside, had seated herself, and was leaning over the girl.

"I thought — perhaps — I was not quite sure, but you might be an angel!"

There was a little silence. Lenox could not speak. She stroked the thin hand. They heard the birds singing outside. They saw the sunshine lying among the flowers, as though it loved them.

"What made you have such a foolish thought about a mere woman?" Lenox asked, at last.

"Because I never knew one who looked and acted just like you."

"The world is full of good women — a great deal better than I am!" continued Lenox, in as light a tone as she could command. "But I am sure none of them could feel more sorry for you, could be more ready to help you. What is your name?"

"Jessie Dawes."

"It is a quaint, pretty name — as quaint as my own, which is Lenox Dare."

"Lenox Dare," repeated Jessie. "Was that what you said?"

"Yes; it sounds oddly to you, Jessie; I fancy it does to most people, when they hear it for the first time."

"It is an odd name. I like it though. Shall you stay a good while?"

"Shall you like to have me, Jessie?"

"Oh, yes. It seems *nice* to have you sitting there in the chair. It seems as though I must have known you a long time."

"That is just the way it should seem. How long have you been here Jessie?"

"Only two weeks, but it seems almost forever."

"And has no friend — no relative — been to see you in that time?"

She shook her dark, little head.

"There was nobody to come. I haven't a relative in the world!"

"Oh, my poor, little Jessie!"

That cry came from Lenox's heart. She was thinking of the time when those words would have been true of herself.

"I had somebody once," continued Jessie, drawn by that tone into further confidences. "It was my grandmother. She died four years ago. I was only fourteen then. We lived in Vermont. I wasn't much more than a baby when papa and mamma died."

"And after your grandmother left you — were you quite alone in the world?" asked again the pitiful, sweet-cadenced voice.

"I was all alone. I stayed awhile with some of

our old neighbors. They were kind at first, but afterward — things changed — and I saw they didn't want me. So I came to Boston to find something to do. In a little while I went into a store."

The simple narrative broke off suddenly. Some memory stopped Jessie Dawes. In a moment she turned to Lenox, speaking in a rapid, excited way: "O lady, you don't know what it is to be all alone in the world — to have nobody to warn you — to believe people are just like yourself. Oh, you don't know what *I* had to learn!"

"Jessie," said Lenox, unspeakably affected, "I was all alone in the world when I was no older than you were. I had no home, no friends, no roof to shelter me! My poor child, I do know how it all seems — what it is like!"

When she heard those words, Jessie Dawes lay still, staring at Lenox in dumb amazement. Could the elegant woman, sitting there in her grace and loveliness, looking as though no wind of heaven had ever blown rudely across her primrose-paths, have known what it was to be a lonely, friendless, homesick orphan girl!

"You, lady — *you* know!" she exclaimed, and stopped there.

"Yes, my poor child, *I* know! There was a time once —"

Lenox could not go on. The contrast of their two fates struck her at that moment so sharply.

"But somebody — something came to help you out of the trouble!" continued Jessie Dawes. "Nobody came to help *me*!"

Nothing could be so pitiful as those last words — none in all her life had ever so hurt Lenox !

“ You are right, my dear,” she said, when she could speak again. “ Somebody did help me — the kindest and best people that ever crossed the path of a friendless orphan girl. I think God sent them. Shall we not think He has sent me to you this morning ?”

At that question, a swift change — half-weariness, half-bitterness — went over the girl’s face.

“ O lady,” she said, “ don’t talk to me about God ! He never cared anything about *me*. *He* never helped me when I was in trouble. If He had, I shouldn’t be here now !”

“ O Jessie — Jessie !” It was a cry of pain, pity, horror.

The girl drew close to the edge of the bed. She gazed at Lenox with her bright, solemn eyes.

“ I didn’t mean to shock you,” she said. “ If God helped you — if He took care of you, of course you must believe in *Him*. But it is all different with me. Perhaps he likes some folks, and doesn’t care about others ! O lady,” she broke out, suddenly, “ If this God you tell me about had only been half as good as you are — half as good as you are !”

“ Oh, my child — my poor child !”

There was no rebuke, only a great pain and pity in the voice. Lenox Dare could look back on a time when she had felt as Jessie Dawes did now.

The girl went on ; “ It’s easy for happy folks to believe in God. I thought he cared for me once — that was before Grandma died. Ah, lady,” she broke

out again, "you sit there, looking at me with your beautiful, sorrowful eyes — do you think you would really believe God cared for you, if He let you go — where He let me!"

It was one of those awful questions with which one soul, in a great strait, will sometimes challenge another.

"But He does care for you — poor little Jessie — because He is *your* Father as much as He is mine. You are His child, as dear and precious to Him in your pain and loneliness, as I am in my health and prosperity."

"Do you think that? Do you really believe it?" asked Jessie Dawes, with a kind of slow wonder in her voice. "You look at me as if you did. You don't blame me, either, as all the others would, for what I have said. I have heard a great many people *talk* about God! Some of them were very cruel to me, lady! I used sometimes to wonder if He was like them!"

"Like them! They must have *lied* to you about Him, Jessie!"

"That was what I tried to believe — for awhile, at least. Afterward, when the worst came, I gave up thinking about Him. Why should I care for One who showed so plainly He didn't care for me?"

"But what if all that were a mistake; what if all the time He was caring for you — pitying you, His little girl — so helpless, so lonely, so heart-broken — in some deeper, tenderer way than ever your dead Grandmother could have done!"

At those words a change came over the rigid face;

the pale lips quivered. She turned to Lenox with a silent, probing gaze that seemed to go past her face, to seek her soul.

At last the girl drew a long breath.

"Miss Dare — was that the name?" she asked.

"Yes, Jessie."

"You know I am going to die. When I asked the doctor, he would not tell me, but I saw it all the same in his eyes."

"Did that make you sorry, Jessie?"

"N — o. There don't seem to be anything I should want to live for!"

There was nothing for Lenox to say. Any commonplaces — any poor attempts at consolation, would be worse than failures. She only sat still, with the pity in her face, and stroked the dry, little fingers with her own soft ones.

After awhile the girl spoke. She addressed the look in the beautiful, sorrowful eyes.

"I think I should like to tell you all about it before I die," she said. "I never could talk about it to anybody before, but it seems to me you will understand."

"You shall tell me anything you want to, Jessie."

Then the girl began her story. She spoke first of the quiet, little home in Vermont, where she lived with her doting old grandmother, and where she grew into girlhood in happy ignorance of all the grief and evil in the world.

Then the old grandmother died. The little, heavily mortgaged house was sold to pay the funeral expenses, and afterward there was no more care, or love, or happiness for Jessie Dawes!

She found a cold welcome for a time with some neighbors ; but her position grew so uncomfortable that she finally made up her mind to go to Boston, and seek employment.

The bewildered girl, barely sixteen, found herself in the great, jostling city, with no acquaintances, except two or three old playmates. One of these took pity on her, and secured her a place in a store. It was a new life — it was hard work for the girl, brought up in the peaceful shadows of the old Vermont hills.

The story came suddenly to a pause. Lenox did not speak. Again those burning eyes searched her face in the silence.

“I didn’t know there was a bad man in the world. Nobody ever told me !” said Jessie Dawes.

Lenox gave a half-smothered cry. Those words would have precisely described her own case. What had saved her from a fate like this girl’s when she made her desperate flight from Cherry Hollows — what had saved her years afterward, when they went away and left her, a young girl, an innocent child in all knowledge of the world, to face the peril at Hampton Beach ?

Lenox Dare could never repeat the story, as she heard it from Jessie Dawes’s lips that morning. The memory of the pale, young face, of the pathetic voice, always overcame her.

It was strange, too, how she would always see again the heap of gay flowers, the glancing sunshine ; how she would hear again all the birds of the summer singing outside, as though the world were as happy

now, as in that old Eden, where they sang through God's first summer.

There were several partners in the store where Jessie Dawes had secured a place at the lace-counter. One of these partners had a guise as honest, a tongue as flattering, a heart as false as Austin Kendall!

The pretty bloom, the fresh innocence of Jessie Dawes attracted this man. He won the confidence and gratitude of the lonely child, homesick for the green highways, and the pleasant old hills. He brightened her life by a thousand little attentions, when nobody else cared for her in the strange, crowded city. The end of all this came suddenly. Not suspecting any evil, Jessie Dawes, one holiday, accepted, with a young girl's natural delight at the change, an invitation to go a few miles out of the city. What followed cannot be written here. Vile women, and evil haunts, and drugged wine had their share in the foul conspiracy. Jessie Dawes, helpless, amazed, bewildered, had the horrible fact of her surroundings and the real character of him whom she had regarded as the kindest and noblest of men, forced on her at last!

In a few days she made her way back to the city. There was nobody to whom the helpless girl could confide the foul plot of which she had been made the victim. She tried to resume her old life behind the counter, in the low attic of her boarding-house. But her spirits were crushed, and her health, fragile from the first, began to break down. She believed, too, that her betrayer, alarmed lest his fiendish work should come to light, and perhaps uncomfortable in

the presence of his victim, had used his influence to get her out of his sight. She lost her place in the store.

Harrowing details followed — the long search for work — the hardships — the times of actual suffering — the hunger and cold — the crushing memory that underlay all the hardship.

There were some lights to this picture certainly. Kind people had crossed Jessie Dawes's path — men and women had spoken pitying words, and reached out helping hands to the friendless orphan girl. But for the most part, it was a flinty road over which, for more than three years, the young feet toiled, slower and slower.

At last Jessie's health broke utterly. A hectic cough tore her; a slow fever wasted her. She found a place in a dressmaker's establishment. The people here showed her kindness — more than anybody had done since her grandmother died. After she grew worse they brought her to the new hospital, which was less than two miles away.

The doctor and the nurses had taken the best care of her. She had nothing to complain of. Only it was lonely sometimes, lying there and listening to the birds singing outside. Once in a while she wondered if they would sing any more if they knew what sort of a world they were in, as she knew!

When the silence fell at last, it was difficult to tell whose face was the whiter, the girl's on the bed or woman's who sat by it. Lenox had listened to the end with a horror that, had she attempted to speak, would have ended in a cry. For it seemed all the

time her own story — the darker side, the Might-Have-Been — to which she was listening. Who had saved her? Who, sitting in His heaven, had seen and let this girl, innocent and guileless as herself, go down to the spoiler?

These questions forced themselves upon the shuddering soul of the woman, and she could find no answer, she could only see how one fate confronted the other, to make the fairer seem like a cruel partiality — an infinite injustice!

All her life Lenox Dare had believed that God had saved her in the straits of her girlhood. Every day she had thanked him for that, as well as for all the gladness of her lot. But to talk to Jessie Dawes of God, of His love and Fatherhood, in the face of the story she had just heard!

She rose from her chair; she was deadly pale; she could not say one word. She pushed open the door, with a blind instinct to be alone, and entered the great, bare, unfurnished room. How still it was! How the hot sunshine glared on the flooring and on the walls! She remembers that to this day — she will remember it to the last hour of her life; for the very foundations of her faith and hope seemed giving way in this awful hour — before this girl's wrecked life. What could she say? what could she do? Life, death — even Uncle Tom's — seemed now a very little thing, with the darkness closing about her — with the dreadful question forcing itself upon her soul: "Was God in His world?"

It had hitherto been an easy thing for Lenox Dare to believe this for herself. But what did it avail

if she could not find Him — His infinite love, His eternal Fatherhood — for another — for the girl lying there — her youth blighted, her heart broken! And her life had once been dear to her — her young girl's hopes and dreams as precious as Lenox Dare's! But these had not saved her. The wolves had found her. They had trodden down all the bloom of her young years. They had left her to this!

Lenox almost resented her own good fortunes. What right had she to them? She had heard people talk before, as though they regarded themselves special pets and darlings of Providence. What a cruel system of favoritism it all seemed! Should she go back and flaunt her own happy, love-sheltered life before Jessie Dawes, and tell her God had done all that? Should she go back and stand there — as she had come away — with dumb lips?

During her life abroad Lenox Dare had often been thrown into the society of materialists and rationalists. She was quite familiar with their side of the argument. They were sometimes people whose intellect she respected, whose noble aims she acknowledged, whose generous enthusiasms for humanity she could share. But their awful negations never shook her. How man or woman could exist a day without hope in a God over His world — an infinite Love and Power at the heart of things — was a mystery to her. But the old arguments would come up now, while clamoring doubts and torturing fears seemed to grow into the faces of fiends that mocked her.

Lenox Dare could never tell how long she walked

the room, where the June sunshine lay warm and bright on the walls and the flooring. It might have been an hour. It seemed like an eternity. She only knew the darkness was about her—the horror of a world without God!

CHAPTER XXVI.

BUT GOD IS.

JESSIE DAWES lay quite still after Lenox had left her. She was haunted by the memory of the white face that had vanished in silence from her bedside. She had been greatly excited in telling her story. The bright flowers around her had a spell that soothed sense and soul. She lay drinking in their beauty, until she fell asleep.

The light rustle of garments awoke her suddenly. A face, radiant with solemn joy, was standing by her bedside; a voice, with an exultant thrill all through its sweetness, was saying to her: "My poor child, I have come back with good tidings for you, too! The doubt and the fear which tore my heart as I listened to your dreadful story are gone! He who made you, must have meant you to be happy. For you His purpose was good, His heart was tender, His thought was love! He, the everlasting God, shall NOT be defeated! I cannot tell you, poor, wronged, innocent child, why the spoiler found you, any more than I can tell you why ravening wolves break in upon the lambs on the pleasant hills — any more than I can tell you why evil is in the world. That is the question which the

best and wisest of men have never answered. Some of the noblest souls have pondered it, until they have gone mad with wonder and pity ; but God has eternity — He will answer it there !”

The radiant face, the voice thrilled with solemn triumph, had a profound effect on the sick girl. But Lenox had been talking less to her, than to her own soul.

“ You don’t believe me, perhaps,” she said, as she met Jessie’s awe-struck gaze. “ Can it be that I — a weak and faulty woman at best — would joyfully lie down, and die here this minute, if *that* would change the past — if *that* could make you rise up well and happy from this bed ? And can the God to whom you belong — you, the child of His thought and heart — be less tender and pitiful than *I* ? He must be a *good* God, after all, Jessie ! Those are *His* flowers that I have brought you ; those are *His* birds that are singing outside. He must have given me this heart that aches over you ! ”

Jessie Dawes put her thin hands over her eyes. The tears rolled over her cheeks. She was too ill to cry passionately.

Lenox Dare was not given to talking lightly of sacred things. She had a horror of cant, of pious commonplaces. But this was one of the great moments of her life. Its light and joy had risen out of a great darkness and pain. She sat down now and took Jessie’s hands in hers. She talked as she had never done before — as, perhaps, she could never do again. She told her about the Christ — the Father’s unspeakable Gift to the world ; how He went about

the earth, homeless and shelterless; how Philip, drawn to Him by His gracious speech and His wonderful deeds — Philip, following Him about with a little company of Galilean fishermen, whom the world thought of small account, had said to Him one day: “Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us!”

This was the question of questions, for the wisest as well as the humblest. It had been at the world’s heart ever since the creation. Everything in the universe, for time and for eternity, hung on the answer. In one way or another the great men of all ages had been asking Philip’s question, even before Christ came. They have been asking it ever since. “Show us the Father.”

And Christ had answered: “He that hath seen *Me* hath seen the Father!”

Philip *knew* Christ. He had been with Him, day by day, among the hills and valleys, through the swarming towns and cities of that old Judean world. He knew what yearning care and love, what unspeakable pity and tenderness for the sorrows around Him, always filled that heart; knew what joy it gave Him to see the sick rise up, glad and healed, at His word; to open the blind eyes to the pleasant world — the deaf ears to the sweet sound of human voices! Philip knew how ready He was — this Christ — to give Himself to all who needed His help or comfort; how nobody — wayside beggar or loathsome leper — was too poor or miserable for Him to care for. Had He not taken, amid cold and frowning faces, the wild little Galilean children on His knees, and blessed them! Had He not spoken to the sinning and sor-

rowing, to the bruised and broken-hearted, such words of forgiveness and consolation, of promise and joy, as man had never spoken, as mere man could never speak again! How Philip's heart must have thrilled as he remembered; how he must have felt that if God, Creator and Father, was like the Christ He had sent to reveal Him, it was the good news of all time—it would be the blessedness of eternity!

And the sunbeams shone among the flowers, the birds sang outside, while Lenox talked, as she could only have talked with that little white face, with those mournful eyes before her.

“If I could have my own way, you should not die, Jessie. I have a home now, a little way off, where I would take you—I, who once was homeless and friendless—and you should nestle down, as I did, in the lap of ease, and comfort, and love. I think I could make you happy. I should know so much better how to do it because I have been through the hard things myself. I should love to watch your young life lift up its head again, and put out fresh blossoms. I think I could almost make the past seem like a strange, terrible dream, out of which you had awakened into a new, happy morning.”

There was a tremulous movement of the little, pinched face. A look of life and hope came into the mournful eyes.

“Dear lady, I think you could do it,” said Jessie Dawes, in a tone that one would not have recognized.

“And if I could do all this, think what God, who loves you so much better, who pities you so much

more, can do ! If you go away from me, my poor child, it shall not be into the dark ; a Love and Help to which all mine must be faint and dim, will wait for you, will meet you, will tell you not to be afraid, will have its own infinite ways of comforting and blessing you, of making you a gladder Jessie than you could ever be with me !”

Her speech failed her there. She sat still, looking at Jessie with tear-dimmed eyes, with thoughts that went where words could not reach them.

At last she heard Jessie’s feeble little voice again, with that new quiver of hope in it.

“ It seems as though it all must be true, now I have seen *you*.”

Afterward she dropped into a peaceful slumber, and in that slumber Lenox went away and left her.

In the week that followed, the sick girl rallied wonderfully. Every day Lenox spent hours with her. She brought her flowers and fruits — everything she could think of to please her fancy, or tempt her appetite.

The sick girl clung to her new friend in a touching way. It seemed as though her childhood had come back. Lenox fancied that, even in this world, the past seemed like a horrible nightmare, that it had slipped away from heart and soul, as the sorrows of life slip away from the presence of death. A softer expression came into the little, sharpened face. She liked to talk about her home and the doting old Grandmother.

Lenox, in her turn, told stories of Briarswild, and of her life there, and the girl would listen intently,

and laugh out merrily at some funny little incident. What a sunny nature it must have been, Lenox thought. How the sweet blossom had been torn up by the roots, and all its soft-tinted petals fouled by cruel hands!

Any one who saw her lying there, amid the flush of roses and all summer blooms, might have fancied Jessie Dawes would get well; but all the time the hectic deepened in the hollow cheeks, and the fires burned brighter in the great eyes.

Lenox was determined to make the most of what life remained to the girl. The last days, the end of the road, should be smooth and pleasant to Jessie Dawes. Lenox brought her pretty, bright-colored dressing-gowns, and she still showed a girlish pleasure in them, as she sat in a lounging-chair by the open window, where the soft breath of the summer could steal in upon her.

Lenox would have taken the girl to her own home, but the doctor feared the effect of the drive over the hills on Jessie's exhausted frame.

One morning, as Lenox was passing through the hall of the hospital, the nurse came to her.

"She has had a turn for the worse in the night," the woman said. "She seems to be sinking fast. She has often asked for you."

When Lenox bent over the bed of the sick girl, she saw there was no more to be done for Jessie Dawes in this world.

The girl looked up, and saw the figure standing there. The dim eyes brightened.

"I knew you would come," she said. "I wanted to live until I could see you once more."

“My poor little Jessie!” faltered Lenox.

A faint smile stole over the cold lips.

“Don’t feel bad for me, dear lady!” they whispered. “I am not afraid to go. I believe I shall find it all — AS YOU SAID!”

She turned over. Her breath flickered feebler and feebler out of the white lips. In a little while the young, peaceful face lay dead in the summer sunshine.

Lenox Dare threw herself down by the bedside.

“O God — Eternal Father,” her soul cried out, “look *at this* — AT THIS! Time and evil have had their way — have done their worst with it! But Thou hast Heaven and Eternity to Thine!”

And calm and glad in that faith she left Jessie Dawes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

ROBERT BERESFORD was at his office in the city. It was a little after mid-day. He was on the point of leaving for the country, when a messenger brought him a letter from the doctor of a hospital, a few miles out of the city. A man, injured on the railroad, had been brought in two days ago. He had fallen across the track in a drunken fit. It was not likely he could hold out much longer. When he learned his true condition, he had begged earnestly that Mr. Beresford might be sent for. He had something to say to the gentleman before he died.

Of course there was nothing to do but to go at once. Beresford had barely time to catch the outward-bound train on the Eastern road.

An hour later, he was at the hospital. The doctor—a rather young man, with a shrewd face, and brisk air—met him on the threshold. As they shook hands, Beresford inquired the sick man's name, but was as much in the dark as ever when he learned it was Oscar Hatch.

“He must have been a miserable creature, to judge from his looks,” the doctor continued. “His recent injuries will have less to do with his death than

drink, and hardship, and the effects of a long-neglected wound, which I suspect he got in some drunken brawl. He obstinately refuses to say anything about that, and, in any case, it is too late to help him. The world, at least, will lose nothing when the man is out of it."

It was a miserable story to begin with. The doctor was a kind-hearted man, but too used to this sort of thing to be profoundly affected by it. His hearer, however, was one of those rare natures, whose quick sympathies could not be deadened by any familiarity with suffering. He followed the doctor to a large room in the back of the great, unfurnished building. There were several beds in the apartment, but its only occupant was the man who had asked for Robert Beresford.

He lay there, a large, strong-limbed figure, with a gaunt, livid face, and gloomy eyes. He was once, probably, a good-looking man; but dissipation, neglect, and suffering had set their wasting marks on him now. With a single glance at his face you would have read their story — would have known that Oscar Hatch had not been a good man.

He raised his head a little, as he heard footsteps approaching. The doctor had come again, but this time he had brought a stranger with him. In a moment Robert Beresford and Oscar Hatch were looking at each other; it was a long, questioning, silent gaze on both sides.

At last the sick man said: "You don't know me, sir?"

"No; I can't recall your face, if I ever saw it.

But I got your message, and came at once. Am I the man you wanted to see?"

"Yes; you are the one man I didn't want to die without seein'. I knew you would come, if you got the word."

"You have met me before, it appears."

"Yes; that was why I wanted to see you now."

At this point the doctor felt the patient's pulse, gave him a cordial, and cautioned him: "Look out, Hatch, and not get excited!"

Then he left the men together.

Robert Beresford seated himself by the bedside, and said, in a voice whose clear, manly quality was not easily forgotten by those who once heard it: "Before you begin, my friend, I have a word to say. It's not much. It's only, I'm sorry for you, man, from the bottom of my heart. I'm sorry for what there may be in the past to trouble you now, and if you will believe this, and will tell me any way in which I can serve you, I shall be glad to do it."

There was a glimmer of grateful feeling in the gloomy eyes.

"It's like you to say that, sir," said Hatch. "I knew you would, if you found me lyin' here."

"How was it you knew so much about me, Hatch?"

"I know more than you'd think, sir. It's four years last May since I first saw you."

"Four years last May!" repeated Robert Beresford. There was a reason why he should remember that May, of all Mays!

"Yes; I'd come down on the railroad, as far as your place, when Joe was off like a streak—he

was a restless little feller—allers takin' it into his head to strike off on his own account."

"Who was Joe?"

"Joe's my boy, sir. He's a likely little dog. He's been all the world to me." The man paused. There was a little quiver about his mouth.

Robert Beresford thought of Philip, and the bond of a common feeling drew him closer to the man lying there.

Hatch looked up suddenly.

"You've seen Joe, sir," he said.

"I have? When have I seen Joe?"

"It was that mornin' I sat behind the hedge of your grounds, and Joe had trotted inside, through the gate, and had found a big swing which took his eyes. He was a starin' at it with all his might, when you came along."

Hatch paused at this point. His hearer tried in vain to recall the circumstance. All that scene in the grounds had passed from his memory—had been swallowed up in the tragedy that happened a little later.

Hatch resumed his talk.

"When you caught sight of Joe you stopped a minute and stared, and then you drew up behind him still as a shadder. I thought you meant to give him a beatin' for intrudin' on your premises. I jest turned fierce as a tiger. I set a world o' store by Joe. The thought that any man would lay hands on him, set my blood on fire. I had a big club in the grass. I griped that. I knew I could leap the hedge in a jiff. I was jest a wild beast that minute.

One blow on the little feller's body and I'd ha' been on you; and you'd ha' measured your length on the ground, and likely never riz again. And there was Joe, with his back toward you, and his eyes, big as saucers, on that swing, not dreamin' either of us was watchin' him! Then, all of a sudden, you bent down, cotched him up in your arms, and lifted him over your head, and he a sprawlin', and a kickin', and the breath knocked out of him, it was all done so quick.

"I couldn't make out what your game was then, but I caught a glimpse of your face, and I see you'd never had an idee o' hurtin' Joe. But I sat still as though I'd been struck by lightnin'; and when Joe see the laugh in your eyes he gave a screech, atwixt wonder and joy—he al'ys took to fun as a duck does to water—and when you tossed him up in the air, and he a shoutin' at the top of his lungs, as though you two had knowed each other all your lives, and you was jest a good playfeller instead of a grand gentleman, and I a watchin' behind the hedge, with a kind of a notion the skies might drop any minute—"

Again Hatch paused. He felt the man beside him, listening intently to every word, give a sudden start. It had come back in a flash. Robert Beresford saw the summer morning—the little boy standing on the edge of the fresh grass—it must have been while they two were having their fun together that the other thing had happened!

"You remember?" asked Hatch.

"Yes, I remember." There was a look in his

visitor's eyes that Hatch could not understand, but it made him silent.

In a minute or two Beresford said: "Go on."

In the next half hour Hatch had related all that occurred that morning. He repeated the talk with the gardener, as though he had just listened to it. He described, in his rough, graphic way, his struggles before he could bring his mind to giving up Joe — the sight of the boy in his fresh clothes; and their talk as they went up to the house, where the interview with the maid had changed Joe's fortunes.

Nobody could have listened to the story unmoved; but all the time Robert Beresford was thinking how he was sitting in his library, when the messenger came, and how, a minute later, he was galloping madly through the May morning.

In the grief that fell and stunned him at that time, Joe had, of course, quite vanished from his mind. From that day to this the boy had scarcely entered his thoughts.

By the time Hatch was through, he was thoroughly exhausted. Beresford put a glass of water to his lips.

"There's something more to tell," he gasped, as soon as he was a little revived. "I—I saw you once after that!"

He looked at his visitor with such an agonized look that Beresford laid his hand on the man's arm, and asked, in his kindest way, "When was that, my friend?"

"Ah, sir, perhaps you won't speak to me like that when you come to hear the truth. Perhaps you'll think I'm a villainous dog, as don't deserve carin' for,

and turn your back and go out o' that door and leave me to the devil, that has a claim on me."

"The devil's claim to a man is something I shall never admit. You may be sure of that, Hatch!"

The invalid fumbled with his big-veined hands at the sheet.

"I can't die without makin' a clean breast of it!" he muttered. "It may stand in Joe's way, though."

"No," said Beresford. "It shan't stand in Joe's way."

With a dreadful effort, the next words were gasped out: "I was one o' the men who laid in wait for you that night! If it hadn't been for me you'd never have got out o' them woods alive!"

"What do you mean?" Robert Beresford sprung from his chair, as he spoke.

It was now nearly a year and a half, since his race for life, through the November woods. He had never obtained the slightest clue to the criminals. His broken wrist occasionally troubled him.

During the next quarter of an hour, the mystery, which had so effectually baffled him, was cleared up.

Hatch, with several of his old tramping comrades, was in Massachusetts. The cold weather was coming on. The men were out of money, and out of work. They had been prowling around the country until poverty, idleness, and desperation made them ready for any rascally business that fell in their way.

That afternoon, when Beresford was riding out to his friend's, he had come across a farmer, mounted on a load of hay. The man was an old acquaintance. The two had stopped and had some talk, mostly

about the weather and the crops; but in answer to an inquiry of the farmer, Beresford had stated where he was going that afternoon.

On the other side of the road, a man, skulking behind a stone wall, had listened to this talk. This man was one of Hatch's comrades, and they were now out on a tramp together. As Beresford rode away, a villainous plot hatched itself in the ruffian's brain. He had neither courage nor skill to carry it out alone. He resolved to share the peril and the plunder with two cronies, on whom he could rely. He sought them at once. He laid open his plot to their greedy ears. He had heard the man on horseback say he should not return until after dark. The road home would take him through the woods. A cry of distress might serve for a decoy. The farther they could draw their victim from the road, before they laid hands on him, the better for their purposes. The prize this time was a gentleman, the ruffian averred to his comrades. It was a chance worth trying for. There might be a big haul of money, and more or less valuables. Everything would be in their favor—the night, the lonely woods, the swift surprise, three stout fellows—armed, desperate, against one man, without any means of defence, with no human being in reach of his voice!

When the matter had been thoroughly canvassed, the villains made their murderous compact; they took their oaths to stand by each other; they drank heavily, to steady their nerves and to drown any scruples they might have about shooting their victim if he made the slightest resistance. After dark they went

into the woods together. Hatch had a knack at imitating the voices of men and animals. It was his cry which had drawn Robert Beresford into the heart of the woods that night.

When the moon came out of the clouds, and her pale light touched the calm, resolute face, Hatch had instantly recognized it. In his better moments the man had all along cherished a vague purpose of bringing Joe back to the gentleman who had so strangely befriended him. But time and drink had weakened the impulse of that morning. Then the two had wandered off into northern New York, where Hatch had been leading a vagrant life, returning occasionally to work and sobriety; but idleness and bad blood always got the upper hand in a little while.

Hatch's discovery had instantly sobered him. In what followed he had acted on the spur of the moment, hardly conscious of what he was doing. He only knew that a great horror and remorse were forcing him on—that every fibre in his brawny frame seemed charged with superhuman strength; he would have fought with Titans to save the life of the man he had been hunting to the death.

He was not, however, to escape himself. One of his comrades, maddened by his defection, and the victim's escape, had turned suddenly and fired. Hatch was wounded in the breast. Exposure and neglect had inflamed the hurt. Hatch had feared to seek a doctor lest inquiries should lead to detection. When he resumed his tramps he found the old strength was gone; though his iron frame had not wholly broken down until he met with the accident on the railroad.

By the time he had finished, Hatch was more exhausted than ever. What the confession cost him, only the man who heard it, and saw the twitching of the lips, the writhing of the big frame, the drops on the forehead, could ever imagine.

After Beresford had held the water to his lips again, the sick man continued: "You know the wust now, sir. It's too late to do me any harm; but there's Joe—you promised me it shouldn't stand in his way."

"I promise you that again, Hatch, now that I know all. I shall always remember that it was to Joe I owed my life, that night."

At those words there was a flash of unutterable joy and gratitude in the man's eyes.

When Robert Beresford saw that, he asked, quickly, "What is it you want me to do for Joe, Hatch?"

"Jest what I wanted you to do for him the day we went up to your house, and I'd brought my mind to the partin'. I want Joe *to have a chance*. He's got good stuff in him. He takes after his mother. I've kept him from seein' the vile side o' things. He ain't much more notion on't, for all the rough times we've had together, than your own boy has, sir. I don't ask you to make him a gentleman; but if you'll only give him a chance, Joe'll come out an honest man."

Robert Beresford laid his white hand on the big, hard one.

"Joe shall have his chance. You may trust him to me, Hatch."

"You'll think of your own boy al'ays, sir, when it comes to dealin' with Joe?"

"I will think of my own boy always when it comes to dealing with Joe," answered Robert Beresford, solemnly.

No oath could have sealed more strongly the promise of the living man to the dying one.

"I'm satisfied sir," answered Hatch, and a look of inexpressible relief stole over the haggard face.

There was a knock at the door. The gentleman must leave at once, if he would not lose the next train. One of the partners was to take the steamer the following day, for Europe. He could not go without a last interview with Beresford.

The doctor thought Hatch might hold out a week or more. Beresford promised to return, if possible, the following afternoon. Joe would probably be there by that time. He had been left behind, in the country, when his father set off on, what proved to be, his last tramp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DIFFERENT MEETING.

IN the summer forenoon Robert Beresford walked up the winding paths which led among flowerbeds and shrubberies to Miss Dare's front door. The grounds, in all their gay summer bloom, lay about him. When he first caught sight of the cottage, hidden like a gray nest in a green covert, he said to himself: "What a bit of Eden it is! I wonder what sort of people inhabit it!"

The landscape had a more soothing effect on soul and sense because of the scene from which he had just come. Half an hour before he had left the hospital, where Hatch lay dead. The doctor's sagacity had in this instance proved at fault. His patient had sunk suddenly, and when, late in the afternoon, Joe arrived, it was all over with his father.

Donald Brae had been out on some errand, which took him past the hospital. He was driving past at sunset, when he caught sight of a boy, with a round, black head, and some very shabby clothes, sitting cross-legged by the gate, and sobbing with all his might.

The kind-hearted Scotchman drew up in his wagon, and asked, in his rugged vernacular, "Hoot, laddie! why are ye greeting?"

The boy lifted his head, and stared, with black, wet eyes, at the stranger. The honest, pitying face won his childish confidence, for he answered in a moment: "My father's dead!" Then he broke out in a kind of howl of grief and despair.

Donald was out of the light wagon, and at the child's side in a moment.

"What is your name, laddie?" he asked, in a voice like a woman's.

"Joe Hatch."

At that instant the doctor appeared. Donald and he were well acquainted by this time, for the gardener, during Jessie Dawes's illness, had been daily at the hospital, on errands for his mistress.

A few inquiries brought Joe's story to the light. He had been sent for, at his father's earnest entreaty. He had made the journey of more than two hundred miles alone. When he reached the hospital his father had been dead several hours.

Mr. Beresford had telegraphed that he found it impossible to come out before the next day. That gentleman, it appeared, was the only friend the dead man had. They left it for him to decide what should be done with the boy.

Joe, staring with troubled eyes, from one face to the other, drank in this talk. At its close the doctor was called away.

Donald looked at Joe, and thought of the little boy lying far away under the purple harebells, on the Scotch hill-side.

"Come hame with me, bairnie," he said. "My lass 'll mither ye owre nicht!"

Joe would not have comprehended the words, if the pitying look, the kindly voice had not helped him. He hesitated a moment. He thought of the grand friend who was coming to-morrow, and whose image had stood all these years far back in his childish memory. But the present was very forlorn, and Joe was hardly eight. He had been terribly shocked at the sight of that white, silent thing, which had been his father, lying on the bed, in the hospital ward. The thought of spending the night in that vast, strange building, with the awful death so near, frightened him. He heard Donald promise the doctor, when the latter returned, that the boy should be brought back in time to meet the gentleman next morning. At that, Joe, without a word, put his hand in the man's, and a moment later the two were driving off in the light wagon.

When Robert Beresford reached the hospital next morning, he learned, to his great surprise, of Hatch's death. He had never dreamed the end was so near. It was too late for the help and comfort which he had hoped to bring into this man's last days. As he stood, gazing on the face, that wore now the solemn majesty of death, he thought, with unutterable pity, of the miserable, wrecked life — of its dreadful frustration of all original powers and intents. Then he remembered that night in the woods. Had there not been

“A little good grain, too,”

in the poor fellow lying there, Robert Beresford would not have been standing over him now. That deed, at least, would be put down on his side, in the “great audit.”

For the rest, Hatch had told the truth. He had been "a bad man." He had gone to his own place. What that was, only God knew.

Joe had not returned. When Beresford learned that the boy was only three miles away, he inquired the road, ordered a horse, and set out at once. Half an hour's gallop carried him over the hills. So it all came of Joe Hatch that Robert Beresford was walking up the grounds to Lenox Dare's front door, in the pleasant, summer morning.

He had ascended the piazza, and was on the point of ringing the bell, when there was a rustle of draperies on his right, and, turning suddenly, he saw a lady who had just stepped through the open window. She started, and stood still on seeing him; and Robert Beresford and Lenox Dare looked at each other in silence, as, long ago, they had looked in Cherry Hollows Glen.

I suppose the time has come for me now, if ever, to describe Lenox Dare's appearance. I should like to paint her for you as she stood there that morning. But this is something beyond my power. Those who knew her best, who felt most deeply the spell of her presence, the varied grace and charm of look, and speech, and manner, could never agree when they came to discuss them.

A stranger, meeting her for the first time, would be struck by her slender form, by her eyes, large and heavily-lashed, and of intense brown. He would notice, a little later, the delicate features, the clear, olive skin, the masses of hair that matched the eyes, and framed the whole. But of how many other women

might all this and more be written! How utterly it fails to give you any idea of Lenox Dare.

For, added to all this, was the nameless something which recalled the "Fair Women" of legend and poetry, which seemed to make possible the dreams and ideals of one's youth. Those who met her, indeed, thought less of her than of something else, of faces and forms which men have dreamed on canvas, or tenderly carved in marble, or embalmed in immortal verse.

For Lenox Dare's power did not lie chiefly in her beauty. She had a wonderful gift of calling out latent possibilities, of inspiring the noblest moods, the most generous impulses, of those who came closest to her. People, of course, responded to this power in different degrees; but the woman of whom I write never touched a human soul except on its finest side.

Lenox Dare, as I said, stood quite still, face to face with Robert Beresford. Where had she seen this man before? She was trying to answer the question. The longer she gazed, the more it baffled her. Yet the impression was so strong that it had the force of conviction. She waited for him to speak and enlighten her.

This feeling was not singular. Robert Beresford had not greatly changed; he hardly looked ten years older than he did at the time when Lenox first saw him. What happened at that time had, however, slightly confused her memory. Vividly as she recalled each event of the interview, she was always more or less bewildered when she came to the stran-

ger's appearance. She only had an impression of something grand and noble, beyond that of any man she had ever seen. She had that impression of the one now standing before her.

Robert Beresford could not, of course, share this feeling, that they had met before. How could that small, brown girl in the glen have possibly suggested the woman standing there, slender and tall, with the startled look in her vivid brown eyes!

She wore this morning a dress of some light fabric, and of a pale gold color. Her uncle had charged her never to put on a thread of sable for his sake. She had on a shade-hat, and she carried a pair of garden-shears — she was on the way to her flower beds.

Robert Beresford, too, stood spell-bound. It was a necessity of his artist-nature that the fleshly loveliness of this woman — the perfection of form, of color, of curve, should strike his senses first. Later, he might come to see farther and deeper than her beauty, until that should become a part of something finer and better than itself.

After his eyes had taken their first, long, silent delight in her loveliness, the thought flashed across him: "What a boor I must seem, staring at her in this fashion."

He lifted his hat. "I was told Miss Dare resided here," he said.

The voice seemed some old echo in her memory. Was it of this land, or did it come from across the sea? Lenox asked herself, while she answered like one in a dream: "Yes; I am Miss Dare."

In a few words the gentleman explained the errand that had brought him to her door.

Lenox had not seen Joe. Donald's wife had told her that morning about the boy her husband had brought home with him from the hospital, to stay over night. The story of the little fatherless waif had touched Lenox; she would have sent for the boy, had not some company arrived at the moment. When these left, Donald and Joe were on their way to the hospital.

The gardener's wife was in the hall. She heard the gentleman inquire for Joe, and came forward to say that the boy and Donald had left an hour before.

Beresford's horse stood at the gate. He had left word at the hospital where he was going. Would he have time to dash over the hills and overtake the pair, or would they have started on their return, before he could reach the hospital?

He had not decided when Miss Dare spoke again. The gentleman's account of his errand had not confirmed her impression of their previous meeting. She spoke now with her usual simple directness: "I cannot recall your name—your face even. Yet I am almost sure I have seen you before."

"I think you must be mistaken, Miss Dare," he answered, and his eyes smiled on her. "This is the first time I ever had the pleasure of meeting you."

A look of puzzled bewilderment came over her face. She seemed half reluctant to admit his own assurance, and he thought to himself: "Does she really imagine a man could ever see her and forget it—such a splendid creature as she is!"

At this point, Donald's wife interposed. "She was sure her husband would bring the boy back at once.

It would be a pity if the gentleman should start, and miss them again."

"That is true, Rachel," answered Lenox, feeling now that she was awaking out of a dream, and she invited the gentleman to walk in, and wait until the two returned.

Beresford hesitated a moment. He had believed that time was precious to him that morning. But — in an instant he had thanked Miss Dare — he had accepted her invitation — he had introduced himself.

The name had no association for Lenox. That notion of their previous meeting must, after all, have been a mistake. Yet she could almost have sworn to it. If it had ever happened, it must have been in some pre-natal state. At that thought, something like the dream of a smile was on her lips, as she ushered her guest into the library.

The most ordinary people, when they met Robert Beresford, were struck by his appearance. His noble presence, his fine head, his manly beauty, attracted others. It was a pleasure to see him, to talk to him, even for those who could only know him on the surface.

The room which he entered struck Beresford's artistic sense at once. The simple, tasteful furnishings, the harmony of color, the restful atmosphere, with its fragrance of freshly culled flowers, all had an inexpressible charm for him. It seemed the fitting environment for such a mistress, he thought. And then he looked at Lenox — she had removed her hat and gloves, and seated herself near a window — and he forgot all about the room.

On the right was a small piece of sculpture which

Mr. Apthorp had picked up in his last visit to Italy. It was a peasantboy, bending over a newly-found shell. Something in the attitude reminded Beresford of Rude's Neapolitan fisherman in the Louvre — that famous work which made the great sculptor's name and fortune in a fortnight.

When her guest mentioned this likeness to Miss Dare, she told him that her uncle had always insisted on the resemblance between the fisherman and the peasant. He had been a great admirer of the French sculptor, she said.

In this way, the conversation opened that morning between Robert Beresford and Lenox Dare. Two hours of talk followed — talk to both the most simple and delightful possible; full of new zest, surprise, suggestion, yet as natural and unconstrained as though they two — unconscious of each other's existence a moment before — had been friends for years. Indeed, Lenox all the time had a curious feeling that her guest was no stranger. They both gave themselves up to the rare delight and stimulation of the interview. They talked of whatever came uppermost — of life, of art, of the world at home, across the sea — and in the talk, and in the pauses that came between, in those subtle sympathies which reveal themselves alike by speech and by silence, the man and the woman began to discern each other's real quality.

At the end of two hours — it did not seem a quarter of that time to Miss Dare and her guest — there was a stir at the door. Joe had come! He stood there with his round, black head, his tanned face,

his little, chubby figure. Rachel had tidied him that morning, and mended some rents in the shabby clothes, so that his appearance was altogether an improvement on the boy Donald had found sobbing at the hospital gate.

Joe knew Robert Beresford at the first glance. It was more than four years since the two had met, but Joe had never forgotten that wonderful hour, that grand friend, that glorious playmate. He had always cherished a belief that if they could only meet again all his troubles would end at once. There would be nothing more for him but happy times, endless fun, fine clothes, and dinners, the very thought of which made his mouth water. To poor Joe, tossed about the world, illtreated by his father, when the man was drunk, and half starved a good deal of the time, Robert Beresford was the only God he knew anything about, and to be with him was heaven.

Trembling in every limb of his round little body, for joy, Joe was yet shy. He stood still in the doorway, twirling his bit of cap in his red, stubby fingers. His face was radiant.

But when the gentleman, seeing him, rose at once, put out his hands, and said, "Well, Joe, have you come at last?" in the old, kindly tone he remembered so well, the boy forgot everything else, and darted across the room with a little yell of delight, not even seeing the lady, with her beautiful, questioning eyes, who sat by the window.

"We have had a long chase for each other, Joe," continued Beresford, entering into the feelings of the boy with those swift sympathies which was largely

the secret of his power over others. "You look as though you were glad to see me."

"Yes, sir'ee, I am," replied Joe. "I've come to stay with you now. My father al'ays used to say I should."

The boy's lip suddenly quivered. At the hospital he had taken another long look at the silent, ghastly figure on the bed, that looked so like, and yet not like, his father. At that sight, grief and fear had swept over his childish soul again, and he had sobbed as though his heart would break.

"I know you are come to stay with me, Joe," answered Beresford, as he sat down and drew the little fellow between his knees, while the strong man's heart grew very tender over this worse than orphaned boy — this poor little waif, who had been so strangely thrown on his help and pity; and whose best fortune it was that his father lay dead that summer morning, in the hospital, three miles away.

The gentleman laid his hand softly on the black little head, as he was in the habit of doing on another soft-ringed, brown one.

"I shall try to make you a happy boy, Joe — a good one," he said.

Joe twirled his cap again; his black eyes danced. It was impossible for him to imagine he could be anything but happy and good, now he was with his friend. He knew he had been something else very often in the miserable times that were gone.

In a moment he broke out, eagerly, "Is the swing there?"

"The swing is there, Joe."

The boy gave a little howl of joy. He had not been trained in drawing-room manners. Yet there was something pathetic in the way his childhood asserted its eternal right to happiness. Here Joe Hatch stood — orphaned, homeless, outcast, without a friend in the world save the man with whom he had only once spent a memorable half hour. Yet, despite all the poverty and shame, and loneliness of his lot, his little childish heart trembled for joy ; he was as happy at that moment as it was possible for boy to be, because he had learned “ the swing was there ! ”

All this time Lenox had sat perfectly silent, watching the scene. Her guest felt now that some explanation was due her. He said to Joe : “ Will you tell this lady — Miss Dare — who has been so kind as to allow us to meet here, how you and I first came to know each other.

Then Joe became conscious of the lady's presence. He turned now, and stared at her with the solemn, curious eyes of childhood. She smiled on him.

“ Won't you tell me, Joe ? ” she asked.

He drew a deep breath. The red, stubby fingers plucked nervously at the cap. In a moment the words came in broken sentences : “ It was ever so long ago ; I got inside the gate. There was a swing there. *He* come up softly behind, and see me a stand-in' and watchin' it. First I knew, he had cotched me up in his arms, and was a-tossin' me up and down in the air. Oh, it was jolly ! Then we had a swing. I hit the tree each time. Then a man come along, and they talked, and — and — the man took me into

the house, and I had on some bran-new clothes, and such a breakfast! It was all high jinks! Then it grew still, and nobody came, and when I got tired of eatin' I went to the door and looked round, and couldn't see nobody. Then I found my father a sittin' behind the hedge, and he told me he'd heard and seen all that went on the other side. Then he said as how he'd made up his mind to give me to the gentleman, and we went up to the house ag'in; but the woman wouldn't let us in, and said her master was gone."

When Joe finished there was a little silence. Donald, standing all this time in the hall, came forward now and apologized for being absent so long. They had waited at the hospital for Mr. Beresford, before setting out home again.

Then Lenox and her guest learned, to their amazement, that their interview had lasted more than two hours.

As Beresford rode away, with Joe in front of him, he thought of what Goethe had said of Rachael Varnhagen: "She is one of those souls whom I love to call beautiful!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRIENDSHIP.

L ENOX DARE stood on the piazza and watched the pair ride away. She had not asked her guest to call again. She had not even thought of it. Yet she had a feeling that this was not their last meeting. She walked across the piazza in the hot sunshine, for it was now a little past mid-day, and not a leaf of all the curtaining vines about her stirred in the sultry stillness. It seemed as though the world was holding its breath. Even her thoughts moved in a vague sort of reverie. Every few minutes the noble head, the grand presence, would rise before her, so strange yet so familiar. Of course that fancy of hers, about their former meeting, was all a mistake, she kept saying, until at last she made herself believe it. When Rachel came to tell her lunch was ready, she seemed to wake out of a dream.

For a fortnight Robert Beresford, in his intervals of leisure, usually found himself thinking of Lenox Dare. He was haunted by a great curiosity regarding her. She had left some fine aroma in his memory. That could not be the effect simply of her beauty, powerfully as that had impressed his artist nature. He said to himself, often, "I must see that woman again!"

This was a very easy thing to do. They had already spoken of mutual acquaintances. Beresford could have sought Miss Dare equipped with the proper letters of introduction. But this seemed to him now too conventional a way of approaching her. He could not even bring himself to make a single inquiry regarding her.

Lenox was right ; Robert Beresford did come again. One morning she entered the library, and most unexpectedly found him awaiting her there. She had come in from out-doors, and had not yet heard of his arrival. He was standing by the mantel, over which hung a little marine picture — a bit of sandy beach, and huge green waves crested with foam, while in the west flamed a red bar of sunset-cloud. He was looking at this when Lenox came in, the pale roses in her cheeks a little brightened by her walk.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Dare,” he said, for his manner and speech, with their perfect courtesy, were always simple and direct, “for calling again, without your permission. I have not even brought the letters of introduction which I perhaps ought to have done.”

“I am very glad you felt there was no need of letters, Mr. Beresford,” answered the voice that had haunted his memory like music, and the lady gave him her hand, with a welcome in her eyes.

If all this sounds very odd and informal, I can only say that you must remember the kind of man and woman they were, and that each had already recognized in the other a nature touched to fine issues.

After this informal greeting, the talk followed

naturally. It opened ever into wider vistas. And always the thought and speech of the one stimulated and allured that of the other. It kindled their noblest feelings, enthusiasms, sympathies. In such rare, delightful intercourse, hours go almost like minutes. Robert Beresford found that he had barely time to reach the next train, and begged Miss Dare's pardon for staying so long.

It need not be said that he came again. I cannot trace here, step by step, the acquaintance as it grew between this man and woman. The more they saw of each other, the more their sympathies — intellectual, artistic, moral — came to light. What Mrs. Charles Kingsley, in her life of her husband, has beautifully said, was true also of this other pair: "And gradually the new friendship, which yet seemed old — from the first more of a recognition than an acquaintance — deepened into intimacy."

Robert Beresford came often to visit Miss Dare. What restful, inspiring, altogether delightful hours he passed under that gray roof! He had not dreamed the world held anything for him so precious and stimulating as he found this new companionship. While he talked with Miss Dare the whole horizon of his life seemed to widen and glow with the old enthusiasms and aspirations of his early youth. All the hopes and purposes of his noblest hours seemed possible to him in her presence.

What was true of their first conversation was true of all that followed. Books, and art, and human life — the world about them — the lands where they had traveled — the people whom they had met, were in

turn discussed. Of course the mood of the time formed the key-note of the talk ; but through all its phases, grave and gay, earnest and playful, the strong and noble soul of the man, the tender and gracious one of the woman, more and more recognized and rejoiced, as all true souls must, in each other. Indeed, within a month after they had first met, they might have said, what Goethe did long ago : "For the first time I may well say I carried on a conversation. For the first time was the inmost sense of my words returned to me, more rich, more full, more comprehensive, from another's mouth. What I had been groping for was made clear to me. What I had been thinking, I was taught to see."

Lenox Dare had, as she once told Ben Mavis, friendships with men. But all others—even that with uncle Tom—seemed to lack something fine and perfect, which this man—so late a stranger—brought her. It had come into her grief and loneliness an unutterable solace and pleasure, yet, like all the other best things, as naturally and easily as dawn rises out of the dark.

Robert Beresford came out often in the late afternoons, and took supper with Miss Dare. Sometimes they walked among the grounds, or strayed outside into the green old lanes, and shady, sweet-breathed coppices around Lenox's home, while thoughts and words, "many hued, many shaped," arose between them. Two or three times they drove over to the beach, in the summer twilight, and listened for awhile to the voices of the sea. This "love of all out-doors," as Lenox used half-playfully to call her delight in

natural scenery, was one of the many feelings where the two could meet on common ground.

A friendship like this, is, of course, no ordinary experience. From its very nature, it could only exist where there was a wide range of vital sympathies. Such a companionship would always be a cause for unutterable thankfulness to the two who enjoyed it. Each would be likely to cherish a feeling of immense gratitude toward the other. Beresford, for his part, had not a doubt that he received vastly more than he gave. Lenox would have said the same thing of herself.

In their thought — after a little while in their speech — each called the other, “My friend!” oftener than they did by any other name. This intercourse was the more perfect because no dream of love ever entered into it. Each would have resented the thought as a wrong to the other. Despite all these years of loss and loneliness, Robert Beresford had believed that no other woman could take the place of the dead wife who had been so suddenly wrenched out of his life that May morning.

If Lenox Dare had had lovers she was not the sort of woman to talk about them. She believed that her fondness for her uncle, her sisterly attachment to young Mavis, would be the strongest emotions of her life. She was too thoroughly a woman, however, not to have a consciousness of possibilities of passionate devotion in herself. But there was a side of her nature, which, through all her girlhood, had been as slumber-bound as the princess in the beautiful, old legend. He who was destined to awake the sleeper,

came — so runs the story — soft and unheralded, through silent gardens, and stately palace. She saw no form, she heard no footfall, until he stood by her side, and called her, and she awoke and knew him.

Before the summer was over Robert Beresford brought Jack Leith and his wife to see Lenox Dare. Returning from their visit, they were driving home from the railroad station, when Jack said to his wife: "What a splendid creature she is!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Leith, a sweet-faced little blonde, with sparkling eyes and pale gold hair, "Miss Dare is lovely. O Jack! when I saw those two together, I could not help imagining a romance. Such a glorious pair as that man and woman would make!"

Jack gave his horse a sharp cut with the whip.

"How absurd you are, Gertrude! All that notion is worthy a romantic school-girl. The two are simply friends. With such a man and woman that means a great deal."

"But is it impossible that friendship may ripen into something more, even with people like them? Of course they don't dream of such a thing now."

"And never will. Gertrude you always were a sentimental little humbug!"

"But, at all events, I have a woman's instincts," answered Gertrude, with a pout of lips that seemed to have stolen the bright red of a brier-rose. Then she added: "Jack you are a goose! There never was a man who was anything else!"

Jack broke into a merry laugh as they drove up to the gate, "How lucky it was, my dear," he said, "that you added that last clause. You may call me

bad names as often as you like, if you will only include the rest of my sex in your category ! ”

Meanwhile Joe was getting on. Beresford had taken the boy for the present to his own home. He was in Martha's kindly hands once more. Joe had discovered that life, even in the paradise he had been so long dreaming about, was not altogether what his fancy had painted — not merely one long frolic and feast — not an eternal “jolly time” with the grandest playfellow in the whole world.

At eight years, even, the human animal finds it hard to learn new habits. In the midst of his good fortune Joe sometimes had a hankering for the old, careless tramp life, with all the hardness and misery thrown in. He sometimes looked down ruefully at his polished boots, as he remembered what fun it was to throw up his bare, dirty little heels in the wet grass, or splash through the big pools after a rain.

School, at first, was a dreadful stumbling-block ; and for weeks he was sorely tempted to run off, and have one day, at least, in the old vagabond fashion. But though he frequently tried the patience of those who had immediate charge of him, they discovered that one argument had weight with him when all others failed, and that was the approval of Mr. Beresford — the light in which he would regard Joe's behavior.

Through all his trials and his bad tempers, Joe's confused little brain, and childish heart still held loyally to his benefactor. To please him gave the boy a greater satisfaction than anything else in the world. He had his rewards, too. The gentleman

always took a walk in the grounds after breakfast. It was understood that Joe would accompany him. The boy's face would be radiant as he trotted along, chatting eagerly, his little brown hand clasped tightly in his friend's. But the crowning joy arrived when they came to the swing. Joe would whisk into the seat, and, the next moment, shouting with glee, would mount among the branches, while Beresford stood by, doing his part, and thoroughly enjoying the fun.

Indeed Donald confided to his wife that anybody, seeing them together, would find it hard to tell which was the greater boy — Joe or the master!

In the first week of autumn Lenox received a letter from Ben Mavis. While he wrote, a little boy lay sleeping his first sleep, by his mother's side, in the cottage at Briarswild.

When Lenox read that she made up her mind what she would do.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

THE morning after Lenox received her letter Robert Beresford came out. He had not seen her for several days. When she came in, in some light robe, whose folds hung cool against the sultry morning, she said to him: "I am glad to see you, Mr. Beresford. I feared lest you should come and find me gone."

"Find you gone!" he repeated, and something in his tone told her a part of all the words meant to him.

"Yes," she answered, "but only for a little while. I expect to leave for Briarswild to-morrow."

"A little while, I think you said, Miss Dare? What do you call a little while?"

"A month, perhaps. Ben and Dorrice will hardly let me return in less time — don't look at me in that way, Mr. Beresford!" she exclaimed, for there was something in his eyes which hurt her. She was too thoroughly this man's friend to think of herself, to feel flattered at the look which told her, better than any words could, how much he would miss her.

"I beg your pardon if I looked at the moment what I felt. I see now what these months have

been to me, as I feel what the next one will be without you. What will it seem not to come here; not to hear your voice; not to see your face, my friend?"

Lenox scarcely heard the last words. She found herself wishing that the visit might be put off. Then she felt a swift pang of remorse, of resentment, for her friends. It seemed a wrong to them, an ingratitude, because, for this man's sake, she was not more than half glad to go to Briarswild!

She spoke now rather to this feeling than in reply to him.

"But I must go at once. I should never be able to forgive myself if I delayed an hour to see the son of Ben Mavis."

"I am not so selfish a brute as to desire you should do that, Miss Dare." Then he opened a magazine. "I have brought you a new poem to read," he said. He had been much in the habit of bringing anything which pleased him in his reading to Miss Dare. Any noble or beautiful thought, any graceful fancy, any perfect bit of imagery — he would bring all these to enjoy afresh with a mind so thoroughly appreciative and responsive as hers.

The poem which he read now was one of Whittier's rustic ballads, a lovely, homely old legend, set in rhyme. One could almost hear through the words the rustle of the ripening corn, the low murmur of streams over mossy stones — almost catch the breath of the sweet clover and the wild briar roses, almost see the white flash of the sea-bird's wing, and the broad river-meadows asleep in the sunshine. The voice of the reader lent a fresh charm to the ballad.

"How lovely it is!" Lenox said, when he paused. "I think some echoes of that poem will linger for me in the air all day, Mr. Beresford."

"I am glad to hear you say that," he answered; and then he sat silent for a while, looking at her. At last he spoke again: "I shall write to you sometimes, Miss Dare."

"I hope you will."

"But, despite that resource, I foresee I shall have some miserable, lonely moods to fight through. I must be on my guard now."

"Against what?"

"Against my fiend of a temper!"

"One might really suppose, from your talk, Mr. Beresford, that you were often angry."

"That would be a mistake, too. I never feel quite sure, however, that I have more than throttled my ancient enemy — that he may not be biding his time to spring on me. What are you thinking about, Miss Dare?"

"It has just recurred to me that when I met you the first time, on the piazza, I said to myself, 'This man's anger must be a terrible thing!' Indeed, it seemed for the moment as though I must have sometime seen you in a great outbreak of passion. It is the more curious, too, because everything of that sort is so wholly unlike you."

"Your instinct was simply marvelous!" he said, looking at her with amazement.

"I can't agree with you, when I remember how signally it failed me at that time. There was an instant or two when I could have sworn we had met before."

"Yes, you certainly were at fault there. As though I could ever have seen you, Miss Dare, and forgotten it!"

He spoke quite involuntarily; but the next moment it struck him as rather curious that this speech came nearer a compliment to Miss Dare's beauty than anything he had ever said to her.

In a moment she spoke again, following the train of her association: "I have often seen people in tempers, and I have been annoyed, pained, shocked, as the case might be. But only once in my life have I been frightened by the sight of an angry person."

"Was the anger of so terrible a nature, then?"

"It was vivid enough, certainly; but that which gave it its force was its perfect justice. I had done—what seemed an unpardonable wrong."

"You—*you* wrong anybody, Miss Dare?"

"It was wholly accidental on my part, but it was none the less an irreparable mischief. I cannot think of it now without its hurting me!" There was a little tremulousness on her face—in her voice.

"But if you were not to blame, nobody certainly had any right to be angry with you."

"But—the person of whom I speak could not possibly know how innocent I was of any intentional harm. The cruel wrong was before his eyes—the circumstances all against me. When he did learn the truth, he made the amplest, the most beautiful apologies a man could."

She spoke now with a thrill in her voice. Anything in her experience had an interest for him.

"I wish you would relate the story, Miss Dare," he said; "unless you have reason for not doing so."

Lenox hesitated. In the course of their acquaintance she had sometimes spoken of her life at Cherry Hollows. Yet her friend had, in reality, very little notion of it. She had, during her uncle's life, seldom alluded to her childhood, because the subject was painful to him. This reticence had become a habit. Her uncle was the only person to whom she had ever related the scene in Cherry Hollows Glen. Her jealous tenderness for his memory kept her silent over all that might awaken a suspicion of his having neglected her. But almost against her will she found herself speaking in a moment. For the second time in her life she was relating the events of that far-away morning.

"How well I remember that morning, Mr. Beresford!" she said. "It was the most perfect of summer days. Mrs. Crane — you remember she was my grand-uncle's widow, with whom I was left after his death — was in wonderfully good humor. She had set her heart on having company at tea, and I was sent off early into the pastures to gather berries. Before ten o'clock my basket was filled, and I had started for home on the winding old turnpike, when I reached a point which afforded a fine view of the Glen. I leaned over the bars, on one side of the road, and gazed down into the green gulf. I can see, at this moment, that little girl, with her brown dress and basket of berries, as she went along the road — as she leaned over the bars that morning!"

She paused a moment. Robert Beresford looked at the speaker, as she sat before him in her cool

dress. Wherever she moved, he thought, some grace and fragrance of perfect womanhood must cling to her. While she talked he tried to imagine the scene. The picture he drew was sufficiently vivid to himself, but it was not in the least like the Lenox Dare who came with her basket out of the berry-pastures that morning.

In a moment she went on: "Something at the foot of the Glen attracted my attention. A young man stood there, with his back toward me, evidently gazing at the scene. I can see him, after all these years — the tall, lithe figure — the small cap on the proud young head.

"Just on the right of the stranger stood something which I was not long in discovering must be an easel. I knew then he was an artist. Instantly a curiosity to see that picture took possession of me; I had never, it seemed to me, in my whole life, so longed to get at anything. While I was thinking about it, the artist suddenly drew something from his pocket, and disappeared on a foot-path among the trees. I knew then he had gone to a spring not far away. My chance had come now. What a wild, headlong impulse it was! I half shudder now to remember how I flung myself over the bars, and plunged down that steep gorge of over a hundred feet."

"It was a mad thing to do!" exclaimed Miss Dare's guest.

"It certainly was. The wonder is that I did not break my neck. But the catastrophe befell me when the worst of the peril seemed over. An old trunk,

rotten and slimy, lay in my way. My feet slipped ; I tried to save my berries, and lost my balance. I rolled down into the Glen. I fell with all my force against the easel. I rose at last, a good deal scratched and torn, and dreadfully bewildered with my fall. The berries had rolled after me. I picked up my basket ; and then I caught sight of a canvas, on a bush in the hollow. Great, spike-like thorns had pierced it. I saw a dreadful rent in the centre. I dashed down and tore away the canvas. I turned it up to the light. It was as I feared. The beautiful picture was ruined !

“ In a moment — why are you looking at me in that way ? ” she asked suddenly, meeting his eyes. For they were staring at her with something indescribable in their luminous depths. Was it amazement, doubt, bewilderment, which almost stunned him for the moment ? All the time he had listened intently to her story ; but in a flash it came over him that she was relating what had happened long ago in Cherry Hollows Glen. It broke upon him so suddenly, and with such force of conviction, that he grew quite pale.

“ Are you ill, Mr. Beresford ? ” Lenox asked, anxiously, seeing that he did not speak.

“ Not in the least, thank you, ” he said, recovering himself by a strong effort. “ But I am very deeply interested in your story. I want to know what happened next, Miss Dare ? ”

“ What happened next, was the artist’s return. ” Lenox became too absorbed in her recital to notice her friend. Indeed, he sat still as a statue ; he

scarcely breathed as he listened, and drank in every word. Was he dreaming? Would he wake up in a moment? The wonder was that he could have taken the story from her lips, and gone on with it! How perfectly every event lived in her memory! How vividly she painted their first meeting; his terrible outbreak of wrath; her dread of his vengeance; the terror and despair which had paralyzed soul and body!

She paused; but it was only to resume her story at the point where the artist, after tearing up his picture, had gone away, leaving her more dead than alive. She told how a mighty impulse to clear herself in his eyes had suddenly brought her to her feet, how she had followed him, and forced him to listen to her, until the old terror, held at bay for a moment, overcame her again, and she fled from him with a cry. She related how he had found her, crouching among the black shadows at the foot of the old pine tree; and when it came to what passed there, she had not, in all these years, forgotten one word, one tone, one gesture!

But Lenox did not stop here. The time, the scene, had laid hold of heart and brain. She went over with the story of that whole day, with the doubts and fears, the hopes and longings, that had possessed her, until at last the night came, and she stood in the lonely road, with the young moon looking down on her between the gray, muffling clouds, and she knew that she had parted from her childhood forever.

There was another pause. Then she spoke again.

“A little later there came a great crisis in my life, when, all alone, I had to take the step which decided my future. I should never have had strength or courage to face that time, to do that thing I did, had it not been for the scene in Cherry Hollows’ Glen. What that man said to me awoke me from my childhood — aroused some latent energies within me. He must have been a rare and noble nature! He will never know in this world what a debt I owe him. But I always have a feeling that I shall meet him and tell him — that he will listen, and be glad to know — in some other life!”

The thrilling voice, a little tremulous now, suddenly stopped.

Lenox, absorbed in her story, had hardly looked at her guest.

Then Robert Beresford rose, and stood before her. It seemed as though something forced him.

“Yes,” he said, leaning over her. “He *will* be glad to know, Miss Dare; but you will not have to wait until you are in another life, to tell him. It was *I* you met that morning in Cherry Hollows’ Glen!”

“You, Mr. Beresford — *you!*” she exclaimed, and then she sat quite still, staring at him.

The faint rose-bloom faded from her cheeks, the red from her lips. But the truth came to her an instant later. She saw that the face before her and the man in the Glen were the same. How blind she had been not to know it before! Her first instinct was true after all. In a moment it seemed quite natural — the only thing, indeed, that could have been.

“Yes,” she said, in glad, quiet tones, “you *are* the same man. I see it all now!”

But the marvel would not pass with him. He drew a chair to her side. He sat down, and gazed at her awhile in silence. How had this white splendor of a Psyche bloomed out of that brown chrysalid? At last he spoke.

“That little girl,” he said, “was small, and tanned, and scrawny. You are not a woman, Miss Dare, whom it is easy to compliment, but you cannot fail to be aware of — of your own loveliness. Do you tell me that you and that little girl are the same?”

“We are the same!” she answered. Her voice was steady, but her lip quivered.

He took the hand which lay on her lap in his own.

“That little girl,” he said, “laid her hand in mine. Hers was brown with the sun, it was scratched with briars, it was stained with berries. This makes me think of some piece of antique sculpture.”

“But they are the same!” She tried to answer playfully, but her voice shook. The contrast between that day and this — the thought of all the gladness of her life, of all that God had given her, suddenly overwhelmed her; and this woman, with all her fine repose of brain, and nerve, and soul, broke down into passionate sobbing.

Robert Beresford rose again. What had come over him that made him thrill and tremble at his heart — in every fibre of his strong frame? What flooded his whole being with joy so intense as to be almost pain? In a moment he knew that he loved the woman who was sobbing before him — loved her with all that was best and noblest in him, with all the strength and passion of his manhood.

He went out on the piazza. He walked back and forth, unheeding; yet, at the centre of his tumultuous thoughts and feelings, he was conscious, all the time, of a solemn calm — of a supreme gladness.

One thing, however, was certain. Whatever the man felt, he did not dream, as ordinary lovers would, of any return on her part. At that moment, it seemed to Robert Beresford honor and joy enough that he could love such a woman.

Did he walk the piazza for hours? It seemed so to him. At last he turned and went in.

He found Miss Dare sitting where he had left her. How lovely she looked with the flush of her weeping still in her cheeks! She naturally supposed he had gone out and left her alone when her foolish tears surprised her.

The two looked at each other a moment in silence. Then his strong will seemed suddenly to fail him — to yield to a spell mightier than himself. A moment before he had meant to carry his new secret to the grave. He spoke now; the tall form, the noble head leaned over her, as they had leaned long ago.

“I have made a mistake,” he said quietly. “I have believed all this time that my feeling for you, Miss Dare, was that of the sincerest friendship.”

At another time she might, perhaps, have dimly forestalled his meaning, but the last hour had bewildered her, had shaken her out of her habitual calm.

“What was it?” she said, not realizing what she asked.

“It was — LOVE!”

He saw how the word struck her like a blow — how pale she grew — how she shivered from head to foot.

“I did not know,” she said, in a faltering tone, putting her hand to her forehead.

He could have cursed himself when he saw how cruelly he had shaken her.

“I am sure you did not know,” he answered. “I should never have told you, if I could have helped it. I certainly had not the madness to dream of asking anything on my part. I shall never again speak the word which something just now forced from my heart and lips. Let all be between us as though that had never been spoken! Let it never invade our friendship. This has become the best thing — the blessing and inspiration of my life. I am going away now for your sake — for my own! You will hear from me soon after you reach Briarswild. Good-bye, my friend!”

She said good-by. She gave him her hand. She watched him with still, dazed eyes as he left the room. She heard him go through the hall.

But for her, too, had come one of those moments which flash their lightnings to the interior of one's being. Such moments are charged with a divine purpose. They bring the supreme conviction, the perfect knowledge. The light came first to Lenox Dare; then the ineffable joy — a joy that drew her with irresistible power toward the man who had just left her.

She rose from her chair. She went steadily and swiftly toward the door.

"Come back, Mr. Beresford!" she said, and the clear, soft voice had a ring of sovereign command which he had never heard before.

He had just reached the front door. He turned and came back. He found her standing on the threshold. There was not a trace of color in her cheeks; but, after an instant or two of silence, her great, dilated eyes poured into his own all their splendors of light and joy, and tenderness. Then she held out her hands. When Lenox Dare gave her heart, it would be like herself, generously, absolutely, with no reserves.

"I love you, Robert Beresford!" she said. "Thank God I know it now! Better than all the world—better than my own life, I love you!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT BRIARSWILD AGAIN.

LENOX DARE had been a month at Briarswild before Robert Beresford joined her. The Mavises were the only people to whom she confided her engagement. Even they did not learn it until she had been with them more than a fortnight.

It was, of course, an immense surprise. To Ben it was not, certainly, an unmixed joy. But he expressed his real feeling, when he said, looking at Lenox with his deep, quiet gaze: "I cannot believe there is a man in the world worthy to be your husband. If there is, I shall be glad that you have found him."

"O Ben, how your praise shames me!" answered Lenox, grateful tears filling her eyes. "I am no more worthy of it than I am to be Robert Beresford's wife."

But when it came to talking of him, she was shy as a young girl about speaking of her lover. Mrs. Mavis, on the *qui vive* with curiosity, did her best to draw her friend out, but with very indifferent results.

Lenox would not praise the man whose wife she had promised to be — would only describe his appearance in such general terms as would apply to thousands of men.

"I give it up from this time, Lenox," Mrs. Mavis broke out one day, after her questions had met with particularly vague replies. "You are the most aggravating woman, now you are engaged!"

"Wait and see for yourself, Dorrice, dear," answered Lenox, in a half-pleading voice, yet through which Mrs. Mavis fancied she detected a little throb of triumph.

The evening following that talk, Robert Beresford was at Briarswild.

Two days afterward, his host and hostess learned how their guest and Lenox had first met in Cherry Hollows Glen. She related the whole story as they sat together in the twilight, after tea. When she had finished, there was a long silence. Mavis broke it at last.

"Why did you never tell me — never my mother — all this, Lenox?" he asked. There was something restrained in his voice. It might be amazement; it sounded almost like sternness or reproach.

"I do not know, Ben," answered Lenox, in the tone of one who tries to solve some riddle to herself. "I always meant to speak, but the right time did not come. I never told anybody but Uncle Tom, and not him until we had known each other for years."

"It is all more romantic than any novel I ever read," said Dorrice, who had drunk in every word, with her baby sleeping in her arms, bringing back to Beresford the face of some of those golden-haired, tender-eyed Madonnas who had smiled on him so often in the picture galleries of his youth.

The next day, when the two men were walking over the grounds together, Beresford suddenly spoke to his companion: "I never knew until yesterday how Lenox had come to you — what she owes to you! Ah, Mavis, your glance at the first went straight to the mark, while mine — what an egregious blockhead I was that day in the Glen! How little I deserve what has come to me!"

The eyes of the two men met. Something in his host's struck Beresford. In a moment a thought, a suspicion, flashed across him. Then he heard Ben's voice answering quietly: "It is not surprising you saw no farther, Beresford. Had I been in your place that day I should not have behaved as well as you did."

Before Beresford came to Briarswild Ben Mavis had not been prejudiced in his favor. The news of Lenox's engagement was, for many reasons, unwelcome to the man who had been more than a brother to her. But all personal feeling had been merged in his anxiety for Lenox's future. He feared lest her heart and imagination had idealized some nature, shallow and commonplace at bottom. He knew how many men and women wreck their lives in this way — knew how terrible for Lenox Dare would be the awaking from her illusions when marriage had settled her fate. He knew, too, that with her clear instincts, her high moral sense, the awaking from any illusion was, sooner or later, inevitable.

But it was impossible for men like Robert Beresford and Ben Mavis to be thrown together without soon recognizing each other's quality. In less than

two days after his guest's arrival, Mavis had come to the conclusion that a character so noble, a soul so many-sided and rarely endowed, had never crossed his threshold. As for Mrs. Mavis — I suppose no woman could know Robert Beresford without loving him.

The day after the two men had their talk, Beresford said to Lenox: "Mavis is a noble fellow. You and he knew each so long — you were thrown so constantly together, the wonder is —"

"I know what you are going to say," interrupted Lenox. "Such a thought never entered the mind of either of us. Ben only felt for me what the tenderest brother could feel for his young sister; and I — it has struck me now for the first time as a little singular that I never had any young girl's romantic fancies. But I had, half unconsciously, a standard —"

She paused a moment, and then she turned to him with a new light in her face.

"It must have been because I had seen *you*, Robert," she said. "I did not know it; but, ignorant and foolish as I was, you had been a suggestion — you had given me a glimpse of something manly, and tender, and noble, that never afterward crossed my path. I see it all now. It was you that saved me from anything but the most surface fancy, when I was at Hampton Beach. What have I been unconsciously owing you all this time!"

Beresford listened with grateful surprise; but while she was talking he could not forget the look which had struck him in Mavis's eyes. The suspi-

cion which awoke in him at that time has never died out, though he has never again spoken of it, even to Lenox.

In that happy home of her girlhood, her sparkling spirits, her native gayety broke out, unrestrained and infectious. Even Robert Beresford had some new surprise and delight in her playful moods.

His visit had fallen in the loveliest autumn weather. He and Lenox passed much of their time out-doors, visiting her old haunts, and living over the past of both. She had learned through Jack Leith, a good deal of Beresford's artistic promise. Her own instincts had taught her, in their early acquaintance, that he had not the business temperament, but he himself never alluded to the subject, until he came to Briarswild.

One day he told her what had decided him to enter the iron firm. He set before her every motive which had influenced him at the time he made his choice. It was her right to know now.

Lenox sat very still after he had spoken. They could hear in the next room Dorrice crooning to her sleeping boy. At last Lenox spoke in the low-keyed, decided voice which, with her, was a sign of repressed feeling: "There are few things in the world I would not rather face than poverty. I see how it cripples, hampers, half frustrates so many lives. My tastes, my habits, may have made a coward of me. But," and the beautiful head bridled, and the soul of the woman shone in her eyes, and thrilled through her voice, "I think I could bear cold and hunger—I think I could work my fingers to the bone, before

the man I loved should sell his birthright. If he did that to shelter me in ease and luxury, the whole would be to me only — Esau's mess of pottage !”

When he heard her say that, when he saw how she looked saying it, Robert Beresford knew that, had Lenox Dare been his wife, he should never have gone into business.

“Thank Heaven you will have no tests of that sort,” he said, replying to her speech.

Was she speaking to him or to herself: “One of these days — in a little while — you must go back to your easel, Robert.”

“After all these wasted years, Lenox !” he murmured, sadly.

She turned and faced him then, with her radiant eyes.

“It is *not* too late ! It shall not be !” she said.

Were her words inspired ? As she listened, as he gazed on her, he half believed it. Would the old visions — the morning beauty — the sense of power — the joy of achievement, come back again ! Could the presence, the faith, the tenderness of this woman, work miracles — evoke from the grave of years that Gift which had been the Hope and the Life of his youth ?

The day that Robert Beresford left Briarswild, Lenox and Ben Mavis had one of their old evening walks together.

“I am satisfied with your choice,” he said. “You and Robert Beresford must have been intended for each other, in the original constitution of things.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO HOMES.

IN the late November, when the last smile of the Indian Summer lingered dreamily on the hill-sides, and among the brown valleys, Robert Beresford and Lenox Dare were married. They had the quietest of weddings in the gray cottage. Only a few people were present—the Mavises, the Leiths and some old friends of the Apthorps.

Lenox went at once to her husband's home. She did not, however, give up her own. Before their marriage they had decided to occupy the two homes. These stood in opposite directions, nearly equidistant from Boston. The cottage, that looked toward the sea, seemed to fitly supplement the inland mansion, that faced the northern hills.

Of homes like these, of a life like theirs, there is little to write. The supreme contentment of such a marriage must be still, like that of the old friendship, its wide range of sympathies, its satisfying companionship.

Something of a fair, gracious presence that had vanished, seemed still, in Lenox's thought, to haunt the beautiful home, the wide old rooms of which she was mistress. She would not have had it otherwise.

In the large and generous nature of this woman there was no room for any of those retrospections and associations of which a smaller soul might have been conscious. It was the aim of Lenox Dare to keep always tender and vivid in the memory of her husband the love of his youth. Had he failed himself there, she would have felt that she failed herself also.

The love that had come to her — the best gift of God — was, in its tenderness and opulence, a daily surprise to her. But her deepest happiness must always consist, less in the love which she received, than in that which she bestowed.

There was one relation, however, which, at the outset, she found it impossible to realize that she had assumed with her marriage to Robert Beresford.

His son was still with his aunt in Germany, but he was to return home in the early spring. I cannot imagine the position of step-mother would at first seem altogether agreeable to any woman. But it was in the nature of Lenox Dare to see the ideal side of all relations and characters where her own heart was concerned.

She thought about Philip — she entered more or less into his feelings, into his first recoil when he learned what she was — into the pain with which he would hear that a stranger had taken his mother's place in his home — in his father's heart. In a little while there grew up in her soul a yearning pity and love for the boy.

Meanwhile the northern winter went on its way of cold, and storm, and sleet. Robert Beresford was

keeping his promise to his wife, and settling up his business as fast as its varied complications admitted.

The two listened to the wild voices of the winds around their inland home, to the roll of the sea in the gray cottage by the beach.

They came and went in the oddest ways, sometimes staying for a single day — sometimes for a week. Donald Brae and his wife were always on the lookout for them, always had the rooms ready, the hearth-fires bright.

Sometimes, as they sat together, reading, or talking, or dropping into those silences more silvery than any speech, Beresford would look at his wife, and say: "What a woman you are!"

And Lenox would laugh gayly, and answer: "That remark is dreadfully ambiguous!"

But his tone and look were anything but that.

Once she said to him, with a little quiver in her voice: "We are so happy here, Robert, that I am half afraid — as though my own fair fortunes almost mocked the world's loss and sorrow. What have I done to be so blessed? Uncle Tom's dying prophecy has come true."

"Yes; *I* needed you, Lenox," he answered. "The perpetual wonder is that I have you!" he added in a moment, with the humility of the highest love.

"The wonder with me is of a precisely opposite kind," replied Lenox. "But sometimes, Robert, it does all seem a good deal like what Emerson half satirically calls 'the novelist's prosperities.' Here we are — with our two homes, with more wealth than we want, and — oh, I could go on endlessly, but the sum of it all would be — with each other!"

And then for a little while there was silence.

Lenox was the first to break it.

“Sometimes a little fear creeps across me, when I think of the future. The fear does not stay long, but always brings a little chill and shadow with it.”

“What is the fear, Lenox?”

“That we — that *I* must grow old in a little while!”

“Old!” he repeated, with a quiet, amused sort of smile. “Do you really imagine you could ever do that, to me, Lenox?”

She thought of the swift, sure-footed years — how they stole from all human things the grace of youth, the glow of beauty, and she answered, doubtfully: “It is not for myself I care — not even when I think of the fading, the wrinkles, the gray hairs that must have their turn; but the beauty you find in me has grown precious — sacred for your sake. How will you feel to see my youth going?”

Again his grave, tender smile shone on her. Then he said: “When a woman’s soul has become the best part of her beauty — when a man can say to her that she has satisfied his heart and his intellect, and rekindled his imagination, that woman need never be afraid of growing old under his eyes.”

And again there was a little silence. This time the man broke it.

“How often,” he said, “I go back in my thoughts to the road which led me that morning from the hospital over the hills. I shall be going back over it all my life. If I live to be an old man, I shall say of it:

‘To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest, that by its side
Youth seems the waste instead!’”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PHILIP BERESFORD.

IN the early spring Philip Beresford crossed the sea. The boy thought his father the most splendid man in the world. His second marriage had been a severe shock to Philip. He could remember his own mother perfectly. He had never forgotten that day when she lay, white and still, in the ravine, and he sat by her side and watched the curious, whispering crowd around them.

Philip's aunt Edith, kindly and commonplace, had, by her indiscreet comments, augmented her nephew's repugnance to his father's marriage. She had gossiped endlessly about it in the boy's hearing. "Rob," she insisted, "was, with all his genius, just the soft-hearted fellow to be taken in by an artful, ambitious woman. He always fancied people finer and better than they were. Poor Philip would find his home a totally different place now a step-mother held the reins! Of course she would get round his father, by hook or by crook — second wives always did that — and have everything her own way!"

Talk of this sort had been persistently dinned into the boy's ears the winter before he sailed for home.

Meanwhile Beresford wrote very sparingly about

his wife. He entered thoroughly into Philip's feeling at this time, and knew the only satisfactory way of overcoming that would be to let the boy judge for himself. He understood his sister well enough to imagine all she would say.

Beresford went to New York to meet his son. Overjoyed as Philip was to see his father again, a shadow lay all the while on his young heart. He remembered his aunt's talk; he dreaded the first meeting with the strange woman who would be in his mother's place.

He waited for his father to speak of her, but the man never alluded to his wife. They were in the cars, on their way home, when Philip suddenly drew up to his father, and asked under his breath: "Papa, is — is *she* there?"

"Yes, my dear boy, *she* is there. She will be very glad to see you."

This was the sole allusion to Lenox during the journey. Beresford read his boy's heart as though it had been an open book. He pitied him so keenly that the silence, which he knew in the end would prove wisest for all, cost him a great effort.

They reached home just at gloaming. Lenox met them in the hall. She wore that evening a black velvet dress. There was not a hint of color about her. Her uncle and her husband fancied that black or white suited her best, and her own tastes were almost severe in their simplicity.

Philip Beresford is a boy still, but to his dying day he will never forget the graceful vision — the tall, slender woman with the brown eyes, who met

him on the threshold. There was a little tremulousness about the mouth — a flush on the cheeks, which her husband knew was, with her, the sign of inward excitement.

The woman and the boy stood silent a moment, gazing on each other. Lenox saw the slight, lithe figure, the brown, clustering hair, the young, delicate face, where the mother's violet eyes shone clear over all the strong likeness to the father. As she looked down on the boy, all the significance of the relation in which they two stood to each other grew solemnly vivid to her. It must be forever hallowed to her by the sacredness of one grave, by the pathos of its silence, by the sense of its claim. A great tenderness toward this boy — the gift of his dead mother to her heart and life — suddenly came over her.

Then she heard his father saying: "This is my wife, Mrs. Beresford, Philip."

He had never consulted Lenox about the name which she would bear to his son. But he was certain what would best suit her.

She leaned forward now. Had she yielded to her feeling she would have drawn the boy to her heart, but she was not impulsive on the surface. She took the boy's hand between her soft palms, and her voice was quite steady, when she said: "I am very glad to see you, Philip. I hope we shall be — a great deal to each other."

And Philip, still staring at her, answered, with the courtesy of speech and manner which were his inheritance: "I hope we shall be, Mrs. Beresford."

If the words, as you read them, sound strange

and cold, you must bear in mind the sort of people they were — the three naturally proud and reticent when it came to any expression of their deepest feelings.

Lenox understood perfectly. Her husband would not claim from his son, at the first, anything beyond the respect and courtesy due the woman who had taken his mother's place. Other feelings might come with longer acquaintance, and deeper knowledge; but at the beginning it was impossible she could be more to the boy than her husband had called her — his father's wife.

For the next hour Philip did not remove his curious, pleased eyes from Mrs. Beresford, while she talked with him about his voyage, and about the plans his father had made for his coming home.

When the two were alone together, Philip turned to his father, and said, very earnestly: "Papa, she is not at all like — like what I expected."

"No; I did not suppose she would be, Philip," he replied, and that was all that was ever said between them on the subject.

Philip Beresford was a boy — not quite twelve years old; more or less spoiled by everybody. He had a generous heart, a high temper, a boy's love of loud sports and fun, a boy's crude notions and headstrong will. He made a breeze of fresh, young life in the house. Lenox thoroughly enjoyed it. She had never been thrown much with boys, and this one was a source of perpetual interest and amusement to her. She entered with zest into his varied boy's life. Her interest in his young plans and pleasures

never flagged. In a little while Beresford saw that the wish they had expressed on their first meeting had come true — his wife and his boy were “a great deal to each other.”

Philip, of course, found Joe Hatch installed at the house. He and the younger boy soon became the best of comrades. Beresford did not adopt Joe. He kept his promise to the father — he meant to see that Joe came up an honest man. He would give him the chance to develop whatever native faculty he possessed. That would be better than bringing him up as a gentleman's son.

Joe had, from the beginning, an immense admiration for Lenox. He had learned with delight, from Beresford, that she was coming to be mistress of the grand house. It was not in her nature or her husband's to forget that they owed their first meeting to Joe Hatch.

Sometimes when Lenox looked at Philip, and thought of that new fountain of mother-love which had opened in her heart toward the boy, she would exclaim, half involuntarily: “O Philip, you are such a comfort to me!”

And Philip would look in her tender eyes, with his grave, boyish ones, and think to himself: “I wonder what I have done to make her say that!”

But those who saw them together — saw how he would sit and watch her with pleased eyes — how he liked to be by her side; how he would follow her from room to room to tell her what had happened — whatever event filled for the moment with light or shadow his young horizon — those never doubted that Philip Beresford loved his father's wife!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DEARER NAME.

IT was a June morning again. Once more Lenox Dare stood among her tulip-beds and looked over their sea of gorgeous bloom. She had come down two days before, with her husband and Philip, to stay a week by the sea. Lenox's memory went back suddenly to a year ago, when she had stood in the same place, with the darkness and ache at her heart. She remembered Jessie Dawes ; she remembered how the dawn had arisen on the night of her loneliness and grief, how the supreme joy of her life had come when she believed that all her joys had vanished.

She had learned much through her own bliss. She had come to feel, in a deeper sense than ever before, that it was God's will that His creatures should be happy — that He must have meant that from the beginning ; and that what He meant, must be,

“At last — far off — at last — to all.”

She turned at length from her flower-beds, and went on through the grounds. In one corner of these was a little rustic arbor, roofed over with green vines. They made a dim, cool nook in the hottest noonday. When Lenox came here, she caught sight of a small brown head on the low seat. She went

inside, and found Philip stretched at full length, and fast asleep. The shadows of the vines trembled on his delicate, young face, and over his damp, brown curls. Lenox drew a low seat to his side, sat down, and watched the sleeping boy, shading his eyes from a stray sunbeam or two. At length Philip stirred, opened his eyes, and saw, in the shadowy stillness, the beautiful face that bent over him.

“Why, Mrs. Beresford,” he exclaimed, “how did you come here?”

“I was out in the grounds, and happened to be passing this way, when I caught sight of a brown head lying on the seat. I came in softly, and have been watching you — ten minutes, perhaps. What made you go to sleep, Philip?”

“It does look a good deal like a two-year old, napping at this time of day! I didn’t know I was tired; but when I passed here it looked so cool and still I just stopped in, and dropped off in a flash. Papa and I had the jolliest swim this morning.”

“Swim!”

“Yes. Papa proposed it when we were on our way to the station. I know the notion struck him when we came in sight of the bay. We went down on the rocks, found some bathing suits, and in two minutes we plunged in. We had glorious fun for the next half hour, tumbling about in the big waves. Papa missed the next train, but the fun more than paid for that.”

“I am glad you had the fun. It was just like your father to start off in that way. One is never quite sure of what he may do the next minute.”

"Papa is splendid on a lark! But," continued Philip, his voice growing grave, "he is a dreadful muff when it comes to letting me have any fun on my own hook."

"What does that mean, Philip?"

"Some of the fellows are going off on a tramp to-morrow, to Blue Hill. It will be just the jolliest lark! I asked papa about my going, but he didn't look encouragingly. He doesn't realize that I am almost twelve years old. Here Philip rose from his seat, and straightened his slender figure. "He has the most absurd notions about my being unable to take care of myself. It isn't pleasant."

"I can imagine not — altogether."

"The idea," continued Philip, in a half indignant, half aggrieved tone, "of not trusting a fellow as far as Blue-Hill, who has tramped half over Switzerland with his cousins! I believe papa does not know I have grown a day older since I left home. A fellow at twelve don't like to be treated like a milksop!"

"Well, Philip, I will talk over Blue Hill with your father to-night."

Philip hurrahed at that. "I am sure to go now," he said. "Papa will never refuse anything you ask him."

"I am afraid that is hardly a compliment to him," said Mrs. Beresford, gaily.

But a moment after she grew silent, gazing at Philip, until there was a tender shining in her eyes. At last she laid her hand softly on his curls.

"I like to see my little boy happy!" she said, with a soft thrill in her voice.

Philip looked up. He saw the tender shining in the dark eyes. They seemed to draw his heart toward them.

"Dear, beautiful Mamma!" he murmured.

It was an involuntary exclamation. He had made it a good many times before — in his thoughts. He was not aware that he had spoken until he saw the look in Lenox's face. Then he flushed like a girl.

"Philip," she said, in low, tremulous tones, and with a slight, deprecating gesture, "I have no right to that name. It belongs to the dead."

But when he heard her say that, he broke out again: "Yes you have — the best right in the world. I don't like that other name. It sounds so — so formal — just what everybody else calls you."

"It never sounds so to me when you speak it, Philip. You — your father's boy — give it a meaning no one else can. And, in any case, I care very little for names. Something which lies back of them is of real value to me."

"What is that?" asked Philip.

"It is my boy's love."

"Of course you have that," he answered, moved out of his usual shyness. "But why shouldn't you have the name, too?"

"What have I done that — that you wish to give it to me?"

"Everything. You have been from the first so kind, so good to me. I do not believe any boy ever found such a one before."

As she listened, a great tenderness drew all her heart toward the boy. She clasped her hands on his

shoulder, as long ago she had clasped them on uncle Tom's.

"Philip," she said solemnly, "I cannot tell what you have been to me — what a new blessedness I have found in loving you. How often I have looked at you, and thought of the mother whose gift you have been to me. She had to die in the midst of her youth and happiness to leave me papa. How shall I thank her sometime — somewhere — for leaving me *you!*"

He was still a moment, thinking his boy's thoughts. Then he broke out again: "I am so glad it was *you* instead of somebody else — Mamma! Mamma!"

He said over the sweet name half to himself, as though he loved the sound; and then he looked up archly in her eyes.

"I may call you that — may I not?" he said, drawing closer to her.

"Certainly, Philip, if you prefer that — if your heart, unsatisfied with any other, gives that to me. But I never want the dearer name simply because I am your father's wife."

"That is not the reason with me, either; it is because — you know — I just told you."

When she heard him say that, she leaned forward, and the woman — not given to light caresses — and the shy boy kissed each other.

They sat still a little while, and then Philip spoke again: "Mamma, I do not believe you are like other women."

"Why, Philip?"

"I don't believe that many would feel toward me,

think of me, as you do. Aun't Edith said that — ”

“ Step-mothers,” suggested Lenox, understanding the boy's sudden pause, and looking into his eyes with a smile. “ You and I do not care for words.”

“ Yes — step-mothers — were horrid things! Do you know,” he continued, remorsefully, “ I didn't like you at all before I saw you. I dreaded the thought of coming home to find you here.”

“ But your feeling, it appears, has undergone a change. Perhaps Aunt Edith's would also when she came to know me.”

“ Of course it would. But that would not alter the truth about other women, you see.”

“ Philip,” said Lenox, with a great seriousness in voice and face, “ I cannot conceive how any woman could marry a man, as I have done your father, without remembering often and tenderly, that other woman who had to leave him, to go away from all the sweetness of love and home into the darkness and silence of the grave. Her own pride and happiness — however great these might be — would be sure to remind her at times of all that another had first to renounce.”

“ I don't believe most of them would think of it in that way,” said Philip, grave as a judge.

“ The way she would think of it must depend largely, of course, upon the sort of woman she was. But the relations would be the same if she had married for any reason but the best one — married a man for his money, his position, his home.” She paused there a moment before she added: “ I could not condemn her in that last case, knowing as I do, what a hard, unkindly world it is to many of the women who

have to struggle through it, unaided and alone. But I am getting quite beyond your depth, Philip."

"There is one thing more, though," said Philip, holding to the subject with the persistency of a boy, when his heart and brain are aroused; "The children themselves might be horrid things, you know — selfish, and rude, and hateful. Do you think, now, the woman could love that kind very much?"

Lenox had to suppress a laugh.

"It would be very hard, certainly, for her to do it. She would be a very rare woman who could always keep in mind whatever was fine and sacred in her relation toward such children. But I thank God, Philip, that you are your father's boy as well as your mother's gift to me."

That night, at the table, Philip's father heard the boy for the first time call Lenox by the name they had agreed on. He gave no sign, however, by so much as the lifting of an eyelid, that he observed it.

But hours later, when Philip came to say good-night, he drew the boy to his heart and held him there, with a look and tone of unusual tenderness.

When they were alone together, Lenox said to her husband: "You heard what Philip called me to-night?"

"Yes, I heard, Lenox. I knew something had gone before that."

"Yes; there had."

She sat very still; she heard outside the soft sound of the summer winds among the leaves — the far-off singing of the waves on the beach.

At last Beresford leaned over and laid his hand on his wife's.

“Tell me, Lenox!” he said.

And she told him, word for word, all that had passed between Philip and herself, that day, in the vine-draped arbor. When she had done, Beresford said to her in that peculiar tone which she had come to know was the sign with him of deep and manifold feeling: “What a woman you are, Lenox, my wife!”

And this time Lenox did not laugh, and tell him there was a dreadful ambiguity in his remark.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WAIT.

THE autumn days had come again — days that enchant the soul with their purple hues and serene depths of sky ; days that have a subtler charm than all the fresh loveliness of the budding May, than all the rich flowering of the midsummer. These were Robert Beresford's favorite days. They made him think, he told his wife, of what some author has said of them : “ Then a wind blows from the region of stories ! ”

Mr. and Mrs. Beresford were at their inland home now. In the twilight they walked together through their grounds.

They came at last to the grassy knoll on which stood the great horsechestnut, with its trunk of mighty girth and its far-spreading branches. It was close to the place where Beresford had first caught sight of Joe Hatch. The two stood still — the tall and noble man, the slender and beautiful woman — and looked off from that height on the panorama spread before them. They saw the green, far-reaching intervalles, the meandering of the Charles, the distant spires and dark roofs of Boston, the gilded dome of the State House, the gray shimmering of the “ noble island-spangled harbor,” the whole glowing in the rosy enchantments of sunset.

The two gazed for awhile in silence. Then Beresford said: "I must go over to Jack Leith's to-morrow. The absurd fellow insists he must have another study of my head before we start for Briarswild."

Lenox glanced up at the fine head that towered over her. She, at least, did not wonder that Jack Leith wanted to make a study of it.

In two days they were to start for Briarswild. It had been agreed, on all sides, that once a year they should visit the home of Lenox's girlhood. For the remainder of their lives they would be content with their inland home and their cottage by the sea.

While they were talking, they suddenly heard the thud of swift feet, the panting of breaths, and the next moment Philip and Joe Hatch rushed up a terrace on the right, and threw themselves on the turf, breathless with fun and laughter.

The two had been having a race together. They talked about it in loud glee, and about the way Philip's bicycle had come in ahead, in the match with the boys, that afternoon, on the old turnpike.

The loud, merry voices suddenly ceased. In a minute or two Philip asked: "What ails you, Joe?"

"What was I doing, Philip?" asked Joe, rousing from a brown study. The last year had made a wonderful improvement in his speech and bearing.

"Nothing — that's just it. You've been as grave as an owl for the last three minutes."

Joe drew a long breath. Then he answered, in an undertone: "I was a-thinking what the boy in our class said to-day. He's a big boy. He said it on the play ground. The others heard him."

“What did he say, Joe?”

“He said cubs that belonged to tramps shouldn’t take on airs. They’d better take to the road, and to their old trade of beggin,’ and robbin’ hen-roosts!”

Philip was on his feet in an instant. His cheeks were on fire; his eyes blazed; he clinched his fists.

“Did he dare to say that?” he cried. “The great hulking coward! I wish I had been there! I’d have gone in — I’d have fetched him one blow that would have laid him flat!”

The boy’s slender figure seemed to expand and grow tall, as it towered over Joe’s thick-set, short one.

“I tried to go at him,” answered Joe; “but some of the others held me back. They said I was too little to fight him.”

Philip laid his hand on Joe’s shoulder. He was almost four years the older.

“Joe,” he said, “if anybody calls you names he will find out he must reckon with *me*.”

Joe looked up, with immense admiration, in the flushed, young face. Then he added, in a moment: “But what he called me was true, you know!” His lip quivered. He had been learning many things since that morning he first stood in Miss Dare’s library.

“Joe,” said Philip, very earnestly, “it can’t make any difference to me — it never will!”

“Are you sure, Philip, when you get to be a man? I couldn’t help it all, you know,” he added, in a way that was indescribably pathetic.

“Do you think I could ever be such a sneak as to

mind that?" exclaimed Philip, his cheeks blazing again. "Oh, don't I ache to fight it out with the bully who insulted you on the play ground!"

Lenox turned to her husband, with kindling eyes.

"There spoke my boy's father!" she whispered.

"There spoke his father's temper!" answered Beresford, half proudly, half tenderly. "Poor Phil! He will have many a hard tussle with that yet."

There was a little silence betwixt the boys. In a few moments Philip spoke again: "Joe, you know I shall go to Briarswild with papa and mamma?"

"Yes."

"When I am gone you may ride my bicycle every day."

"Your bicycle — every day — Philip," replied Joe, in a slow way, as though he found it hard to realize the words.

"Yes; just as though it were your own."

Joe gave a yell; then turned a summersault on the turf. That was a slight relief from a burden of bliss almost too great for the small soul and body to bear — a bliss that quite swallowed up all the talk on the play ground that day.

A little later, restless as two healthy young animals, the two had gone in search of Robert, and the gray squirrels he had brought in from the woods that morning.

In less than half an hour Philip returned by himself. As he went up to the house, he caught sight of the pair under the horsechestnut. He supposed they had just come out. He joined them at once.

"Mamma," he said, "are we really going to Briarswild, day after to-morrow?"

"We are really going, Philip."

"You promised me I should ride Dainty after we got there."

"As often as you like. Dainty is an old veteran now, but I think she can carry you over the hills almost as fleetly as she carried me fifteen years ago."

"Your weight, Philip, won't be likely to break the animal's back," said Beresford, with a laugh, as he looked on the boy's slight figure.

When Philip disappeared, his father said to Lenox: "The dews are beginning to fall. We had better go in," and he gave her his arm.

In the glowing twilight they went up toward the house. It was far too lovely to go in-doors, and they sat down in the rocking-chairs, on the piazza.

The splendor of the sunset, the stillness and beauty of the falling night, the talk between the boys on the lawn, had stirred the hearts of the man and woman. After a little while, Lenox turned to her husband, and said, with a solemn tenderness in her voice: "There have been times in my life when death seemed the pleasantest, the most welcome thing in the world to me! Now it is the only thing I dread, because, when that comes, we must leave each other!"

"When you remember that, Lenox," Beresford answered, "remember also the

'Other heights, in other worlds, God willing!'

Do you suppose we shall have all — have the *best* of each other, even, in this world?"

There was no need of answering that.

They sat a long while without speaking. The twilight faded. The stars followed one another into

the far blue. Lenox began to feel something in the silence. She waited for her husband to speak. At last he leaned forward.

“Lenox, my wife!” he said.

“Yes, Robert.”

“I think I am going to paint a picture that — that you will not be ashamed of.”

“Robert!”

That was all she said.

But he saw her eyes, dilated with joy and triumph, shining on him through the brown darkness; and he knew why her speech failed her.

“After all, it will be *your* picture,” he said. “I never should have done it without you!”

But she did not ask him what the picture would be, and he did not tell her.

It was like her, in an hour like this, to think of others. When she spoke it was of them, rather than of herself.

“There are so many lives, burdened, harassed, incomplete — so many darkened by poverty, saddened by disappointment — so many hearts that ache with frustrated hopes and aspirations that my own lot seems almost a reproach to me. I ask myself what *I* have done to deserve it!”

“There is not a day of my life, Lenox,” answered her husband, “that I do not ask myself the same question.”

“And yet,” she resumed, in a moment, “there is one word I should like to send to all these hearts that ache — to all these burdened, shadowed lives! I should like to whisper it to all who are haunted by

ghosts of Might-Have-Beens, to all who, brave and silent, carry their griefs through the slow years, to all who, bound together for a lifetime by ties that wear and chafe, have learned too late their mistake. And if this word, and my speaking it, could bring to all these some fresh courage, and patience, and hope, I think I could go out from the happiness of this perfect hour — go away — even from you, Robert — into the darkness and silence of the grave, and trust God for our next meeting !”

“What should the word be, Lenox ?”

“Wait !”

Robert Beresford was silent a moment. Then he rose. He laid his hand on his wife’s shoulder. The look of his noblest mood was on his face, as his gaze went off to the far summer stars.

“I see,” he said, “I see ! And the longest waiting, the hardest, the most patient, shall seem, at the last, ‘LIKE A DREAM WHEN ONE AWAKETH !’”

THE END.

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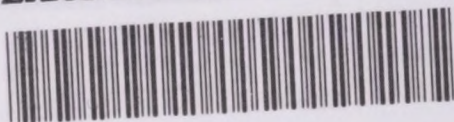
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